

4454. f. 18

S E R M O N S,

LEFT FOR PUBLICATION

BY

JOHN TAYLOR, LL.D.

Late Prebendary of WESTMINSTER, &c.



S E R M O N S
ON DIFFERENT SUBJECTS,

LEFT FOR PUBLICATION

BY

JOHN TAYLOR, LL.D.

LATE PREBENDARY OF WESTMINSTER,
RECTOR OF BOSWORTH, LEICESTERSHIRE,
AND MINISTER OF ST. MARGARET'S,
WESTMINSTER.

PUBLISHED

BY THE REV. SAMUEL HAYES, A.M.

USHER OF WESTMINSTER SCHOOL.

VOL. I.

THE SECOND EDITION.

L O N D O N :

PRINTED FOR T. CADELL, IN THE STRAND

M,DCC,XC.

H. E. M. O. N.

ON DIFFERENT SUBJECTS

LECTURE FOR THE YEAR 1840

JOHN TAYLOR, LL.D.

LATE TREASURER OF WESTMINSTER

RECTOR OF ROSWORTH LANCESHIRE

ADMINISTRATOR OF ST. MARGARET'S

WESTMINSTER.



H. E. D.

BY THE REV. HAZEL A. M.

OF THE WESTMINSTER SCHOOL.

VOL. I.

THE SECOND EDITION

LONDON

PRINTED FOR T. CADELL, ST. MARTIN'S LANE

(v)

I am sure he would have thought no

~~of the same thing as I have~~

GRACE.

TO

HIS GRACE

WILLIAM,

DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE.

MY LORD,

HAD Dr. Taylor been willing, in
his life time, to have obliged the
World with the following Discourses,

a 3

I am

I am fure he would have fought no other Patronage ~~than that of Your~~ GRACE.

This was, of itself, a very strong inducement to me to solicit the same honour. But, even without this incitement, the Virtues which Your GRACE so uniformly displays in private life, naturally point You out, as a Person to whom moral and religious investigations may, with the greatest propriety, be inscribed. And I flatter myself that the following Discourses will not be deemed unworthy of the honour which Your GRACE has been pleased to confer on

(vii)

on the Editor, in allowing your Name
to be prefixed to them.

I am,

MY LORD,

with the greatest respect,

Your GRACE's most obliged,

and most humble Servant,

SAMUEL HAYES.

on the Editor, in allowing your name
to be prefixed to them.

I am,

My Lord,

with the greatest respect,

Your Grace's most obliged,

and most humble servant,

RAMSEY HAYES

S E R M O N I I.

C O N T E N T S.

S E R M O N I.

The Second Chapter of Genesis, and the
former part of the 24th Verse.

*Therefore shall a man leave his Father and
his Mother, and shall cleave unto his
Wife*

Page 1

S E R-

(x)

S E R M O N II.

ISAIAH, Chap. lv. Verse 7.

*Let the wicked forsake his way, and the un-
righteous Man his thoughts, and let him re-
turn unto the Lord, and he will have mercy
upon him, and to our God, for he will abun-
dantly pardon.*

Page 27

S E R M O N III.

PROVERBS, Chap. xxviii. Verse 14.

*Happy is the Man that feareth alway: but he
that hardneth his heart, shall fall into mis-
chief.*

Page 49

S E R-

S E R M O N IV.

ISAIAH, Chap. lviii. Verse 7, 8.

*Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and
that thou bring the poor that are cast out, to
thy house? when thou seest the naked that
thou cover him, and that thou hide not thy-
self from thine own flesh?*

*Then shall thy light break forth as the morning,
and thine health shall spring forth speedily;
and thy righteousness shall go before thee,
the glory of the Lord shall be thy rere-
ward.*

Page 71

S E R.

S E R M O N V.

NEHEMIAH, Chap. ix. Verse 33.

*Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought
upon us, for thou hast done right, but we
have done wickedly.* Page 97

S E R M O N VI.

PROVERBS, Chap. xii. Verse 2.

*When Pride cometh, then cometh Shame, but
with the Lowly is Wisdom.* Page 121

S E R-

S E R M O N VII.

JEREMIAH, Chap. vi. Verse 16.

Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your Souls. But they said, we will not walk therein.

Page 139

S E R M O N VIII.

ROMANS xii, the latter part of the 16th verse.

Be not wise in your own conceits.

Page 161

S E R M O N IX.

I CORINTHIANS, Chap. 11. Verse 28.

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

Page 185

S E R-

(xiv)

S E R M O N X.

GALATIANS, Chap. vi. Verse 7.

*Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for
whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he
reap.*

Page 203

S E R M O N XI.

I PETER, Chap. iii. Ver. 8.

*Finally be ye all of one mind, having compassion
one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful,
be courteous.*

Page 223

S E R M O N XII.

ECCLESIASTES, Chap. i. Verse 14.

*I have seen all the works that are done under
the Sun; and behold, all is vanity and vexa-
tion of Spirit.*

Page 243

S E R-

S E R M O N XIII.

2 Timothy, Chap. iii. part of the 5th Verse.

*Having a form of Godliness, but denying the
power thereof.*

Page 263

SERMON

SERMON XIII.

Timothy, Chap. iii. part of the 5th Verse.

Having a form of Godliness, but denying its
power, these.

SERMON

S E R M O N I.

The Second Chapter of Genesis, and the
former part of the 24th Verse.

*Therefore shall a man leave his Father and his
Mother, and shall cleave unto his Wife.*

THAT Society is necessary to the happiness of human Nature, that the gloom of solitude, and the stillness of retirement, however they may flatter at a distance, with pleasing views of independence and serenity, neither extinguish the Passions,

nor enlighten the Understanding, that discontent will intrude upon privacy, and temptations follow us to the desert, every one may be easily convinced, either by his own experience, or that of others. That knowledge is advanced by an intercourse of sentiments, and an exchange of observations, and that the bosom is disburthened, by a communication of its cares, is too well known for proof or illustration. In solitude perplexity swells into distraction, and grief settles into melancholy; even the satisfactions and pleasures, that may by chance be found, are but imperfectly enjoyed, when they are enjoyed without participation.

How high this disposition may extend, and how far Society may contribute to the felicity of more exalted Natures, it is not easy to determine, nor necessary to enquire; it seems however probable, that this inclination is allotted to all rational Beings of limited excellence, and that it is the privilege only of the infinite Creator to derive all his happiness from himself.

It

It is a proof of the regard of God for the happiness of mankind, that the means by which it must be attained are obvious and evident; that we are not left to discover them, by difficult speculations, intricate disquisitions, or long experience, but are led to them, equally by our passions and our reason, in prosperity and distress. Every man perceives his own insufficiency to supply himself with what either necessity or convenience require, and applies to others for assistance. Every one feels his satisfaction impaired by the suppression of pleasing emotions, and consequently endeavours to find an opportunity of diffusing his satisfaction.

As a general relation to the rest of the species is not sufficient to procure gratification for the private desires of particular persons; as closer ties of Union are necessary to promote the separate interests of Individuals; the great Society of the World is divided into different Communities, which are again subdivided into smaller Bodies, and more

contracted Associations, which pursue, or ought to pursue, a particular interest, in subordination to the public good, and consistently with the general happiness of Mankind.

Each of these subdivisions produces new dependencies and relations, and every particular relation gives rise to a particular scheme of duties; duties which are of the utmost importance, and of the most sacred obligation, as the neglect of them would defeat all the blessings of Society, and cut off even the hope of happiness; as it would poison the fountain from whence it must be drawn, and make those Institutions, which have been formed as necessary to peace and satisfaction, the means of disquiet and misery.

The lowest subdivision of Society, is that by which it is broken into private families; nor do any duties demand more to be explained and enforced, than those which this relation produces: because none are more
uni-

universally obligatory, and perhaps very few more frequently neglected.

The universality of these duties requires no other proof than may be received from the most cursory and superficial observation of human life. Very few men have it in their power to injure Society in a large extent; the general happiness of the world can be very little interrupted by the wickedness of any single Man, and the number is not large of those by whom the peace of any particular Nation can be disturbed; but every Man may injure a family, and produce domestic disorders and distresses; almost every one has opportunities, and perhaps sometimes temptations, to rebel as a wife, or tyrannize as a husband; and therefore, to almost every one are those admonitions necessary, that may assist in regulating the conduct, and impress just notions of the behaviour which these Relations exact.

Nor are these obligations more evident than the neglect of them; a neglect of

which daily examples may be found, and from which daily calamities arise. Almost all the miseries of life, almost all the wickedness that infects, and all the distresses that afflict Mankind, are the consequences of some defect in these duties. It is therefore no objection to the propriety of discoursing upon them, that they are well known and generally acknowledged; for a very small part of the disorders of the World proceed from ignorance of the laws, by which life ought to be regulated; nor do many, even of those whose hands are polluted with the foulest crimes, deny the reasonableness of virtue, or attempt to justify their own actions. Men are not blindly betrayed into corruption, but abandon themselves to their passions with their eyes open; and lose the direction of Truth, because they do not attend to her voice, not because they do not hear, or do not understand it. It is therefore no less useful to rouse the thoughtless, than instruct the ignorant; to awaken the attention, than enlighten the understanding.

There

There is another reason, for which it may be proper to dwell long upon these Duties, and return frequently to them; that deep impressions of them may be formed and renewed, as often as time or temptation shall begin to erase them. Offences against Society in its greater extent are cognizable by human laws. No Man can invade the property, or disturb the quiet of his Neighbour, without subjecting himself to penalties, and suffering in proportion to the injuries he has offered. But cruelty and pride, oppression and partiality, may tyrannize in private families without controul; Meekness may be trampled upon, and Piety insulted, without any appeal, but to conscience and to Heaven. A thousand methods of torture may be invented, a thousand acts of unkindness, or disregard, may be committed; a thousand innocent gratifications may be denied, and a thousand hardships imposed, without any violation of national laws. Life may be embittered with hourly vexation; and weeks, months, and years, be lingered out in misery,

without any legal cause of separation, or possibility of judicial redress. Perhaps no sharper anguish is felt, than that which cannot be complained of; nor any greater cruelties inflicted, than some which no human Authority can relieve.

That Marriage itself, an Institution designed only for the promotion of happiness, and for the relief of the disappointments, anxieties, and distresses to which we are subject in our present state, does not always produce the effects, for which it was appointed; that it sometimes condenses the gloom, which it was intended to dispel, and encreases the weight, which was expected to be made lighter by it, must, however unwillingly, be yet acknowledged.

It is to be considered to what causes effects, so unexpected and unpleasing, so contrary to the end of the Institution, and so unlikely to arise from it, are to be attributed; it is necessary to enquire, whether those that are thus unhappy, are to impute their misery

fery to any other cause, than their own folly, and to the neglect of those duties, which prudence and Religion equally require.

This Enquiry may not only be of use in stating and explaining the duties of the Marriage-State, but may contribute to free it from licentious misrepresentations, and weak objections ; which indeed can have little force upon minds not already adapted to receive impressions from them, by habits of debauchery ; but which when they co-operate with lewdness, intemperance, and vanity ; when they are proposed to an understanding naturally weak, and made yet weaker, by luxury and sloth, by an implicit resignation to reigning follies, and an habitual compliance with every appetite ; may at least add strength to prejudices, to support an opinion already favoured, and perhaps hinder conviction, or at least retard it.

It may indeed be asserted to the honour of Marriage, that it has few adversaries among Men either distinguished for their abilities, or
 eminent

eminent for their virtue. Those who have assumed the province of attacking it, of overturning the constitution of the World, of encountering the authority of the wisest Legislators, from whom it has received the highest sanction of human wisdom; and subverting the maxims of the most flourishing States, in which it has been dignified with honours, and promoted with immunities; those who have undertaken the task of contending with reason and experience, with Earth and with Heaven, are Men who seem generally not selected by nature for great attempts, or difficult undertakings. They are, for the most part, such as owe not their determinations to their arguments, but their arguments to their determinations; Disputants animated not by a consciousness of truth, but by the numbers of their adherents; and heated, not with zeal for the right, but with the rage of licentiousness and impatience of restraint. And perhaps to the sober, the understanding, and the pious, it may be sufficient to remark, that Religion and Marriage have the same Enemies.

There

There are indeed some in other Commu-
 nions of the Christian Church, who censure
 marriage upon different motives, and prefer
 celibacy as a state more immediately devoted
 to the honour of God, and the regular and
 assiduous practice of the duties of Religion ;
 and have recommended vows of abstinence,
 no where commanded in Scripture, and im-
 posed restraints upon lawful desires ; of which
 it is easy to judge how well they are adapted
 to the present state of human nature, by the
 frequent violation of them, even in those So-
 cieties where they are voluntarily incurred,
 and where no vigilance is omitted to secure
 the observation of them.

But the Authors of these rigorous and un-
 natural schemes of life, though certainly mis-
 led by false notions of holiness, and perverted
 conceptions of the duties of our Religion,
 have at least the merit of mistaken endea-
 vours to promote virtue, and must be al-
 lowed to have reasoned at least with some de-
 gree

gree of probability, in vindication of their conduct. They were generally persons of Piety, and sometimes of Knowledge, and are therefore not to be confounded with the Fool, the Drunkard, and the Libertine. They who decline Marriage for the sake of a more severe and mortified life, are surely to be distinguished from those, who condemn it as too rigorous a confinement, and wish the abolition of it, in favour of boundless voluptuousness and licensed debauchery.

Perhaps even the errors of mistaken goodness may be rectified, and the prejudices surmounted by deliberate attention to the nature of the Institution ; and certainly the calumnies of wickedness may be, by the same means, confuted, though its clamours may not be silenced ; since commonly in debates like this, confutation and conviction are very distant from each other. For that nothing but vice or folly obstructs the happiness of a married life may be made evident by examining,

First,

First, The Nature and End of Marriage.

Secondly, The means by which that End is to be attained.

First, The Nature and End of Marriage.

The Vow of Marriage which the wisdom of most civilized Nations has enjoined, and which the rules of the Christian Church enjoin, may be properly considered as a vow of perpetual and indissoluble Friendship; Friendship which no change of fortune, nor any alteration of external circumstances can be allowed to interrupt or weaken. After the commencement of this state there remain no longer any separate interests; the two Individuals become united, and are therefore to enjoy the same felicity, and suffer the same misfortunes; to have the same Friends and the same Enemies, the same success and the same disappointments. It is easy by pursuing the parallel between Friendship and Marriage, to show how exact a conformity there is between them, to prove that all the precepts laid down with respect to the contraction,

tion, and the maxims advanced with regard to the effects, of Friendship, are true of Marriage in a more literal sense, and a stricter acceptance.

It has been long observed that Friendship is to be confined to one ; or that, to use the words of the Axiom, * *He that hath Friends, has no Friend*. That ardour of kindness, that unbounded confidence, that unsuspecting security which friendship requires, cannot be extended beyond a single object. A divided affection may be termed benevolence, but can hardly rise to Friendship ; for the narrow limits of the human mind allow it not intensely to contemplate more than one idea. As we love one more, we must love another less ; and however impartially we may, for a very short time, distribute our regards, the balance of affection will quickly incline, perhaps against our consent, to one side or the other. Besides, though we should love our Friends *equally*, which is perhaps *not* possible ;

* ὁ φίλος ἐ φίλος.

and

and *each* according to their *Merit*, which is *very difficult* ; what shall secure them from jealousy of each other ? Will not each think highly of his own value, and imagine himself rated below his worth ? Or what shall preserve their common Friend from the same jealousy, with regard to them ? As he divides his affection and esteem between them, he can in return claim no more than a dividend of theirs : and as he regards them equally, they may justly rank some other in equality with him ; and what then shall hinder an endless communication of confidence, which must certainly end in treachery at last ? Let these reflections be applied to Marriage, and perhaps Polygamy may lose its vindicators.

It is remarked that * *Friendship amongst equals is the most lasting*, and perhaps there are few causes to which more unhappy marriages are to be ascribed than a disproportion between the original condition of the two persons. Dif-

* *Amicitia inter Pares firmissima.*

ference

ference of condition makes difference of education ; and difference of education produces differences of habits, sentiments, and inclinations. From thence arise contrary views, and opposite schemes, of which the frequent, though not necessary, consequences, are debates, disgust, alienation, and settled hatred.

Strict friendship * *is to have the same desires and the same aversions.* Whoever is to chuse a Friend is to consider first the resemblance, or the dissimilitude of tempers. How necessary this caution is to be urged as preparatory to Marriage, the misery of those who neglect it sufficiently evinces. To enumerate all the varieties of disposition, to which it may on this occasion be convenient to attend, would be a tedious task ; but it is at least proper to enforce one precept on this head, a precept which was never yet broken without fatal consequences, *Let the Religion of the Man and Woman be the same.* The rancour and hatred, the rage and persecution with

* An observation of Catiline in Sallust.

which

which Religious disputes have filled the World, need not to be related; every History can inform us, that no malice is so fierce, so cruel, and implacable, as that which is excited by religious discord. It is to no purpose that they stipulate for the free enjoyment of their own opinion; for how can he be happy, who sees the person most dear to him in a state of dangerous error, and ignorant of those Sacred Truths, which are necessary to the approbation of God, and to future felicity? How can he engage not to endeavour to propagate truth, and promote the Salvation of those he loves? or if he has been betrayed into such engagements by an ungoverned passion, how can he vindicate himself in the observation of them? The education of Children will soon make it necessary to determine, which of the two opinions shall be transmitted to their posterity; and how can either consent to train up in error and delusion those from whom they expect the highest satisfactions, and the only comforts of declining life?

On account of this conformity of notions it is, that equality of condition is chiefly eligible ; for as *Friendship*, so Marriage, *either finds* or makes an equality. No disadvantage of birth or fortune ought to impede the exaltation of virtue and of wisdom ; for with Marriage begins union, and union obliterates all distinctions. It may indeed become the person who received the benefit, to remember it, that gratitude may heighten affection ; but the person that conferred it ought to forget it, because, if it was deserved, it cannot be mentioned without injustice, nor if undeserved, without imprudence. All reproaches of this kind must be either retractions of a good action, or proclamations of our own weakness.

Friends, says the Proverbial observation, *have every thing in common*. This is likewise implied in the Marriage Covenant. Matrimony admits of no separate possessions, nor incommunicable interests. This rule, like all others, has been often broken by low
 7 views

views and sordid stipulations ; but, like all other precepts, founded on reason and in truth, it has received a new confirmation from almost every breach of it ; and those Parents, whose age had no better effects upon their understanding, than to fill them with avarice and stratagem, have brought misery and ruin upon their Children, by the means which they weakly imagined conducive to their happiness.

There is yet another precept equally relating to Friendship and to Marriage ; a precept which, in either case, can never be too strongly inculcated, or too scrupulously observed ; *Contract Friendship only with the good.* Virtue is the first quality to be considered in the choice of a Friend, and yet more in a fixed and irrevocable choice. This maxim surely requires no comment, nor any vindication ; it is equally clear and certain, obvious to the superficial, and incontestable by the most accurate Examiner. To dwell upon it is therefore superfluous ; for, though often

neglected, it never was denied. Every man will, without hesitation, confess, that it is absurd to trust a known deceiver, or voluntarily to depend for quiet and for happiness upon insolence, cruelty, and oppression. Thus Marriage appears to differ from Friendship chiefly in the degree of its efficacy, and the authority of its institution. It was appointed by God himself, as necessary to happiness, even in a state of innocence; and the relation produced by it, was declared more powerful than that of Birth. *Therefore shall a man leave his Father and his Mother, and shall cleave unto his Wife.* But as notwithstanding its conformity to human nature, it sometimes fails to produce the effects intended, it is necessary to enquire,

Secondly, by what means the end of Marriage is to be attained.

As it appears by examining the natural system of the Universe, that the greatest
and

and smallest bodies are invested with the same properties, and moved by the same laws ; so a survey of the moral World will inform us, that greater or less Societies are to be made happy by the same means, and that however relations may be varied, or circumstances changed, Virtue, and Virtue alone, is the parent of felicity. We can only, in whatsoever state we may be placed, secure ourselves from disquiet and from misery, by a resolute attention to truth and reason. Without this, it is in vain that a man chuses a Friend, or cleaves to a Wife. If passion be suffered to prevail over right, and the duties of our state be broken through, or neglected, for the sake of gratifying our anger, our pride, or our revenge ; the union of hearts will quickly be dissolved, and kindness will give way to resentment and aversion.

The Duties, by the practice of which a married life is to be made happy, are the

same with those of Friendship, but exalted to higher perfection. Love must be more ardent, and confidence without limits. It is therefore necessary on each part to deserve that confidence by the most unshaken fidelity, and to preserve their love unextinguished by continual acts of tenderness; not only to detest all real, but seeming offences; and to avoid suspicion and guilt, with almost equal solicitude,

But since the frailty of our nature is such that we cannot hope from each other an unvaried rectitude of conduct, or an uninterrupted course of wisdom or virtue; as folly will sometimes intrude upon an unguarded hour; and temptations, by frequent attacks, will sometimes prevail; one of the chief acts of love is readily to forgive errors, and overlook defects. Neglect is to be reclaimed by kindness, and perverseness softened by compliance. Sudden starts of passion are patiently to be borne, and the calm moments of recollection silently expected.

For

For if one offence be made a plea for another; if anger be to be opposed with anger, and reproach retorted for reproach; either the contest must be continued for ever, or one must at last be obliged by violence to do what might have been at first done, not only more gracefully, but with more advantage.

Marriage, however in general it resembles Friendship, differs from it in this; that all its duties are not reciprocal. Friends are equal in every respect; but the relation of Marriage produces authority on one side, and exacts obedience on the other; obedience, an unpleasing duty; which yet the nature of ~~the~~ state makes indispensable; for Friends may separate when they can no longer reconcile the sentiments, or approve the schemes of each other; but as marriage is indissoluble, either one must be content to submit, when *conviction* cannot be obtained; or life must be wasted in perpetual disputes.

But though obedience may be justly required, servility is not to be exacted; and though it may be lawful to exert authority, it must be remembered, that to govern and to tyrannize are very different, and that oppression will naturally provoke rebellion.

The great rule both of authority and obedience is the law of God; a law which is not to be broken for the promotion of any ends, or in compliance with any commands; and which indeed never can be violated without destroying that confidence, which is the great source of mutual happiness; for how can that person be trusted, whom no principles oblige to fidelity?

Thus Religion appears, in every state of life, to be the basis of happiness, and the operating power which makes every good institution valid and efficacious. And he that shall attempt to attain happiness by the means which God has ordained, and *shall leave his*
Father

Father and his Mother, and shall cleave unto his Wife, shall surely find the highest degree of satisfaction that our present state allows ; if, in his choice, he pays the first regard to virtue, and regulates his conduct by the precepts of religion.



SERMON

Butler and his Master, and shall their name
be left to the world to be the subject of
of his nation that our present state allows
it, in his choice, he pays the full regard to
justice, and respects his conduct by the pre-
sents of religion.



1701

S E R M O N II.

ISAIAH, Chap. lv. Verse 7.

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous Man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

THAT God is a Being of infinite mercy ;
that he desires not the death of a Sinner, nor takes any pleasure in the misery of his Creatures ; may not only be deduced
from

from the consideration of his nature, and his attributes; but, for the sake of those that are incapable of philosophical enquiries, who make far the greatest part of Mankind, it is evidently revealed to us in the Scriptures, in which the Supreme Being, the Source of life, the Author of existence, who spake the word, and the World was made, who commanded, and it was created, is described as looking down from the height of infinite felicity, with tenderness and pity, upon the Sons of Men; inciting them, by soft impulses, to perseverance in virtue, and recalling them, by instruction and punishment, from error and from vice. He is represented as not more formidable for his power, than amiable for his mercy; and is introduced as expostulating with Mankind upon their obstinacy in wickedness; and warning them, with the highest affection, to avoid those punishments, which the laws of his government make it necessary to inflict upon the inflexible and disobedient. *Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts, Mal. iii. 7. Make you a new heart, and*

and a new spirit, for why will ye die, O house of Israel? Ezek. xviii. 31. His mercy is ever made the chief motive of obedience to him; and with the highest reason inculcated, as the attribute which may animate us most powerfully to an attention to our duty. If thou, O Lord, wert extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who shall abide it? But there is mercy with thee, therefore shalt thou be feared. If God were a Power unmerciful and severe, a rigid Exactor of unvaried regularity and unfailing virtue; if he were not to be pleased but with perfection, nor to be pacified after transgressions and offences: in vain would the best Men endeavour to recommend themselves to his favour; in vain would the most circumspect watch the motions of his own heart, and the most diligent apply himself to the exercise of virtue. They would only destroy their ease by ineffectual solicitude, confine their desires with unnecessary restraints, and weary out their lives in unavailing labours. God would not be to be served, because all service would be rejected; it would be much more reasonable to abstract

ſtraſt the mind from the contemplation of him, than to have him only before us, as an object of terrour, as a Being too mighty to be reſiſted, and too cruel to be implored : a Being that created Men, only to be miſerable, and revealed himſelf to them, only to interrupt even the tranſient and imperfect enjoyments of this life, to aſtoniſh them with terrour, and to overwhelm them with deſpair.

But there is mercy with him, therefore ſhall he be feared. It is reaſonable, that we ſhould endeavour to pleaſe him, becauſe we know that every ſincere endeavour will be rewarded by him ; that we ſhould uſe all the means in our power, to enlighten our minds, and regulate our lives, becauſe our errours, if involuntary, will not be imputed to us ; and our conduct, though not exactly agreeable to the divine ideas of rectitude, yet if approved, after honeſt and diligent enquiries, by our own conſciences, will not be condemned by that God, who judges of the heart, weighs every circumſtance of our lives, and admits
every

every real extenuation of our failings and transgressions.

Were there not mercy with him, were he not to be reconciled after the commission of a crime, what must be the state of those, who are conscious of having once offended him? A state of gloomy melancholy, or outrageous desperation; a dismal weariness of life, and inexpressible agonies at the thought of death; for what affright or affliction could equal the horrors of that mind, which expected every moment to fall into the hands of implacable Omnipotence?

But the mercy of God extends not only to those that have made his will, in some degree, the rule of their actions, and have only deviated from it by inadvertency, surprize, inattention, or negligence, but even to those that have polluted themselves with studied and premeditated wickedness; that have violated his commands in opposition to conviction, and gone on, from crime to crime,
under

under a sense of the divine disapprobation.

Even these are not for ever excluded from his favour, but have in their hands means, appointed by himself, of reconciliation to him; means by which pardon may be obtained, and by which they may be restored to those hopes of happiness, from which they have fallen by their own fault.

The great duty, to the performance of which these benefits are promised, is Repentance; a duty, which it is of the utmost importance to every Man to understand and practise; and which it therefore may be necessary to explain and enforce, by shewing,

First, What is the true nature of Repentance.

Secondly, What are the obligations to an early Repentance.

First,

First, What is the true nature of Repentance.

The duty of Repentance, like most other parts of Religion, has been misrepresented by the weakness of superstition, or the artifices of interest. The clearest precepts have been obscured by false interpretations, and one error added to another, till the understanding of Men has been bewildered, and their morals depraved by a false appearance of Religion.

Repentance has been made; by some; to consist in the outward expressions of sorrow for sin, in tears and sighs, in dejection and lamentation.

It must be owned that where the crime is publick, and where others may be in danger of corruption from the example, some publick and open declarations of Repentance may be proper, if made with decency and propriety, which are necessary to preserve

D

the

the best actions from contempt and ridicule ; but they are necessary only, for the sake of destroying the influence of a bad example, and are no otherwise essential to this duty. No Man is obliged to accuse himself of crimes, which are known to God alone ; even the fear of hurting others ought often to restrain him from it, since to confess crimes may be, in some measure, to teach them, and those may imitate him in wickedness, who will not follow him in his Repentance.

It seems here not impertinent to mention the practice of private confession to the Priest, indispensably enjoined by the Roman Church, as absolutely necessary to true Repentance ; but which is no where commanded in Scripture, or recommended otherwise, than as a method of disburthening the conscience, for the sake of receiving comfort or instruction, and as such, is directed by our own Liturgy.

Thus

Thus much, and no more, seems to be implied in the Apostle's precept, *of confessing our faults one to another*, a precept expressed with such latitude, that it appears only to be one of those which it may be often convenient to observe, but which is to be observed no further, than as it may be convenient. For we are left entirely at liberty, what terms, whether general or particular, we shall use in our confessions. The precept, in a literal and rational sense, can be said to direct no more, than general acts of humiliation, and acknowledgements of our own depravity.

No Man ought to judge of the efficacy of his own Repentance, or the sincerity of another's, by such variable and uncertain tokens, as proceed more from the constitution of the body, than the disposition of the mind, or more from sudden passions and violent emotions, than from a fixed temper, or settled resolutions. Tears are often to be found, where there is little sorrow, and the deepest sorrow

without any tears. Even sorrow itself is no other than an accidental, or a secondary, part of Repentance, which may, and indeed ought to arise from the consciousness of our own guilt; but which is merely a natural and necessary effect, in which choice has very little part, and which therefore is no virtue. He that feels no sorrow for sin, has indeed great reason to doubt of the sincerity of his own Repentance, since he seems not to be truly sensible of his danger and his misery; but he that feels it in the highest degree is not to put confidence in it. He is only to expect mercy upon his reformation.

For reformation is the chief part of Repentance; not he that only bewails and confesses, but he that forsakes his sins, repents acceptably to God, that God who *will have mercy, and not sacrifice*; who will only accept a pure heart and real virtue, not outward forms of grief, or pompous solemnities of devotion. To conceive that any thing can be substituted in the place of reformation is a dangerous

dangerous and fatal, though perhaps no uncommon, error; nor is it less erroneous, though less destructive, to suppose, that any thing can be added to the efficacy of a good life by a conformity to any extraordinary ceremonies or particular institutions.

To false notions of Repentance many Nations owe the custom, which prevails amongst them, of retiring in the decline of life to solitudes and cloysters, to atone for wickedness by penance and mortifications. It must indeed be confessed, that it may be prudent in a Man, long accustomed to yield to particular temptations, to remove himself from them as far as he can, because every passion is more strong or violent, as its particular object is more near. Thus it would be madness in a Man, long enslaved by intemperance, to frequent revels and banquets with an intent to reform; nor can it be expected that cruelty and tyranny should be corrected, by continuance in high authority.

That particular state which contributes most to excite and stimulate our inordinate passions, may be changed with very good effect; but any retirement from the World does not necessarily precede or follow repentance, because it is not requisite to reformation. A Man whose conscience accuses him of having perverted others seems under some obligations to continue in the World, and to practise virtue in publick, that those who have been seduced by his example, may by his example be reclaimed.

For reformation includes, not only the forbearance of those crimes of which we have been guilty, and the practice of those duties which we have hitherto neglected, but a reparation, as far as we are able to make it, of all the injuries that we have done, either to Mankind in general, or to particular persons. If we have been guilty of the open propagation of error, or the promulgation of falsehood, we must make our recantation no less
openly;

openly ; we must endeavour, without regard to the shame and reproach to which we may be exposed, to undeceive those whom we have formerly misled. If we have deprived any Man of his right, we must restore it to him ; if we have aspersed his reputation, we must retract our calumny. Whatever can be done to obviate the ill consequences of our past misconduct, must be diligently and steadily practised. Whoever has been made vicious or unhappy by our fault, must be restored to virtue and happiness, so far as our counsel or fortune can contribute to it.

Let no Man imagine that he may indulge his malice, his avarice, or his ambition, at the expence of others ; that he may raise himself to wealth and honour by the breach of every law of Heaven and Earth, then retire laden with the plunder of the miserable, spend his life in fantastick penances, or false devotion, and by his compliance with the external duties of Religion, atone for withholding what he has torn away from the lawful pos-

feffor by rapine and extortion. Let him not flatter himself with false persuasions that prayer and mortification can alter the great and invariable rules of reason and justice. Let him not think that he can acquire a right to keep what he had no right to take away, or that frequent prostrations before God will justify his perseverance in oppressing Men. Let him be assured that his presence profanes the temple, and that his prayer will be turned into sin.

A frequent and serious reflection upon the necessity of reparation and restitution, may be very effectual to restrain Men from injustice and defamation, from cruelty and extortion; for nothing is more certain, than that most propose to themselves to die the death of the Righteous, and intend, however they may offend God in the pursuit of their interest, or the gratification of their passions, to reconcile themselves to him by Repentance. Would Men therefore deeply imprint upon their minds the true notions of Repentance
in

in its whole extent, many temptations would lose their force ; for who would utter a falsehood, which he must shamefully retract ; or take away, at the expence of his reputation and his innocence, what, if he hopes for eternal happiness, he must afterwards restore ? Who would commit a crime, of which he must retain the guilt, but lose the advantage ?

There is indeed a partial restitution, with which Many have attempted to quiet their consciences, and have betrayed their own souls. When they are sufficiently enriched by wicked practices, and leave off to rob from satiety of wealth, or are awakened to reflection upon their own lives by danger, adversity, or sickness, they then become desirous to be at peace with God, and hope to obtain, by refunding part of their acquisitions, a permission to enjoy the rest. In pursuance of this view, Churches are built, Schools endowed, the Poor cloathed, and the Ignorant educated ; works indeed highly pleasing to
 4 God,

God, when performed in concurrence with the other duties of Religion, but which will never atone for the violation of justice. To plunder one Man for the sake of relieving another, is not charity; to build temples with the gains of wickedness, is to endeavour to bribe the Divinity. This ought ye to have done, and not left the other undone. Ye ought doubtless to be charitable, but ye ought first to be just.

There are others who consider God as a Judge still more easily reconciled to crimes, and therefore perform their acts of atonement after death, and destine their estates to charity, when they can serve the end of luxury or vanity no longer. But whoever he be that has loaded his soul with the spoils of the unhappy, and riots in affluence by cruelty and injustice, let him not be deceived! God is not mocked. Restitution must be made to those who have been wronged, and whatever he with-holds from them, he with-holds at the hazard of eternal happiness.

An

An amendment of life is the chief and essential part of Repentance. He that has performed that great work, needs not disturb his conscience with subtle scruples, or nice distinctions. He needs not recollect, whether he was awakened from the lethargy of sin, by the love of God, or the fear of punishment. The Scripture applies to all our passions; and eternal punishments had been threatened to no purpose, if these menaces were not intended to promote virtue.

But as this reformation is not to be accomplished by our own natural power, unassisted by God, we must, when we form our first resolutions of a new life, apply ourselves, with fervour and constancy, to those means which God has prescribed for obtaining his assistance. We must implore a blessing by frequent prayer, and confirm our faith by the holy Sacrament. We must use all those institutions that contribute to the increase of piety, and omit nothing that may
either

either promote our progress in virtue, or prevent a relapse into vice. It may be enquired, whether a Repentance begun in sickness, and prevented by death from exerting its influence upon the conduct, will avail in the sight of God. To this question it may be answered in general, that as all reformation is begun by a change of the temper and inclinations, which, when altered to a certain degree, necessarily produce an alteration in the life and manners; if God who sees the heart, sees it rectified in such a manner as would consequently produce a good life, he will accept that Repentance.

But it is of the highest importance to those who have so long delayed to secure their salvation, that they lose none of the moments which yet remain; that they omit no act of justice or mercy now in their power; that they summon all their diligence to improve the remains of life, and exert every virtue which they have opportunities to practise. And when they have done all that can possibly be done by them, they cannot yet be certain

certain of acceptance, because they cannot know, whether a repentance, proceeding wholly from the fear of death, would not languish and cease to operate, if that fear was taken away.

Since therefore such is the hazard and uncertain efficacy of Repentance long delayed, let us seriously reflect,

Secondly, upon the obligations to an early Repentance.

He is esteemed by the prudent and the diligent to be no good regulator of his private affairs, who defers till to-morrow what is necessary to be done, and what it is in his power to do, to-day. The obligation would still be stronger, if we suppose that the present is the only day in which he knows it will be in his power. This is the case of every Man, who delays to reform his life, and lulls himself in the supineness of iniquity. He knows not that the opportunities he now rejects will ever be again offered

offered him, or that they will not be denied him because he has rejected them. This he certainly knows, that life is continually stealing from him, and that every day cuts off some part of that time which is already perhaps almost at an end.

But the time not only grows every day shorter, but the work to be performed in it more difficult; every hour, in which Repentance is delayed, produces something new to be repented of. Habits grow stronger by long continuance, and passions more violent by indulgence. Vice, by repeated acts, becomes almost natural; and pleasures, by frequent enjoyment, captivate the mind almost beyond resistance.

If avarice has been the predominant passion, and wealth has been accumulated by extortion and rapacity, Repentance is not to be postponed. Acquisitions, long enjoyed, are with great difficulty quitted, with so great difficulty, that we seldom, very seldom, meet with true Repentance in those
whom

whom the desire of riches has betrayed to wickedness. Men who could willingly resign the luxuries and sensual pleasures of a large fortune, cannot consent to live without the grandeur and the homage. And they who would leave all, cannot bear the reproach, which they apprehend from such an acknowledgment of wrong.

Thus are Men with-held from Repentance, and consequently debarred from eternal felicity ; but these reasons, being founded in temporal interest, acquire every day greater strength to mislead us, though not greater efficacy to justify us. A Man may, by fondly indulging a false notion, voluntarily forget that it is false, but can never make it true. We must banish every false argument, every known delusion from our minds, before our passions can operate in its favour ; and forsake what we know must be forsaken, before we have endeared it to ourselves by long possession. Repentance is always difficult, and the difficulty grows still greater by delay. But let those who
have

have hitherto neglected this great duty remember, that it is yet in their power, and that they cannot perish everlastingly but by their own choice! Let them therefore endeavour to redeem the time lost, and repair their negligence by vigilance and ardour! *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous Man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*



SERMON

S E R M O N III.

PROVERBS, Chap. xxviii. Verse 14.

*Happy is the Man that feareth alway: but he
that hardneth his heart, shall fall into mis-
chief.*

THE great purpose of revealed Religion
is to afford Man a clear representation
of his dependance on the Supreme Being, by
teaching him to consider God as his Creator,
and Governour, his Father and his Judge.

E

Those

Those to whom Providence has granted the knowledge of the holy Scriptures, have no need to perplex themselves with difficult speculations, to deduce their duty from remote principles, or to enforce it by doubtful motives. The Bible tells us, in plain and authoritative terms, that there is a way to life and a way to death; that there are acts which God will reward, and acts that he will punish. That with soberness, righteousness, and godliness, God will be pleased; and that with intemperance, iniquity, and impiety, God will be offended; and that of those who are careful to please him, the reward will be such, as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard; and of those who, having offended him, die without Repentance, the punishment will be inconceivably severe, and dreadful.

In consequence of this general doctrine, the whole system of moral and religious duty is expressed, in the language of Scripture, by the *fear of God*. A good Man is characterised, as a Man that feareth God; and the fear of
 I the

the Lord is said to be the beginning of wisdom; and the Text affirms, that happy is the Man that feareth always.

On the distinction of this fear, into servile and filial, or fear of punishment, or fear of offence, on which much has been superstructed by the casuistical Theology of the Romish Church, it is not necessary to dwell. It is sufficient to observe, that the Religion which makes fear the great principle of action, implicitly condemns all self-confidence, all presumptuous security; and enjoins a constant state of vigilance and caution, a perpetual distrust of our own hearts, a full conviction of our natural weakness, and an earnest solicitude for Divine Assistance.

The Philosophers of the Heathen World seemed to hope, that Man might be flattered into Virtue, and therefore told him much of his rank, and of the meanness of degeneracy; they asserted, indeed with truth, that all greatness was in the practice of Virtue; but

of Virtue, their notions were narrow; and pride, which their doctrine made its chief support, was not of power sufficient to struggle with sense or passion.

Of that Religion, which has been taught from God, the basis is Humility; a holy fear which attends good Men, through the whole course of their lives; and keeps them always attentive to the motives and consequences of every action; is always unsatisfied with their progress in Holiness, always wishing to advance, and always afraid of falling away.

This Fear is of such efficacy to the great purpose of our being, that the Wise Man has pronounced him happy that fears always; and declares, that he who hardens his heart shall fall into mischief. Let us therefore carefully consider,

First,

First, What he is to fear, whose fear will make him happy.

Secondly, What is that hardness of heart which ends in mischief.

Thirdly, How the heart is hardened.
And

Fourthly, What is the consequence of hardness of heart.

First, We must enquire, what he is to fear, whose fear will make him happy.

The great and primary object of a good Man's fear, is sin ; and in proportion to the atrociousness of the crime, he will shrink from it with more horror. When he meditates on the infinite perfection of his Maker and his Judge ; when he considers that the Heavens are not pure in the sight of God, and yet remembers, that he must in a short time

appear before him; he dreads the contaminations of evil, and endeavours to pass through his appointed time, with such cautions, as may keep him unspotted from the world.

The dread of sin necessarily produces the dread of temptation: he that wishes to escape the effects, flies likewise from the cause. The humility of a Man truly religious seldom suffers him to think himself able to resist those incitements to evil, which by the approach of immediate gratifications may be presented to sense or fancy; his care is not for victory, but safety; and when he can *escape* assaults, he does not willingly *encounter* them.

The continual occurrence of temptation, and that imbecillity of nature, which every Man sees in others, and has experienced in himself, seems to have made many doubtful of the possibility of Salvation. In the common modes of life, they find that business ensnares, and that pleasure seduces; that suc-
cess

cess produces pride, and miscarriage envy; that conversation consists too often of censure or of flattery; and that even care for the interests of friends, or attention to the establishment of a family, generates contest and competition, enmity and malevolence, and at last fills the mind with secular solicitude.

Under the terrours which this prospect of the world has impressed upon them, many have endeavoured to secure their innocence, by excluding the possibility of crimes; and have fled for refuge, from vanity and sin, to the solitude of deserts; where they have passed their time in woods and caverns; and after a life of labour and maceration, prayer and penitence, died at last in secrecy and silence.

Many more, of both sexes, have withdrawn, and still withdraw themselves, from crowds and glitter, and pleasure, to Monasteries and Convents; where they engage themselves, by irrevocable vows, in certain modes of life,

more or less austere, according to the several institutions; but all of them comprizing many positive hardships, and all prohibiting almost all sensual gratifications. The fundamental and general principle of all monastic communities, is Celibacy, Poverty, and Obedience to the Superiour. In some, there is a perpetual abstinence from all food that may join delight with nourishment; to which, in others, is added an obligation to silence and solitude;—to suffer, to watch, and to pray, is their whole employment.

Of these, it must be confessed, that they fear always, and that they escape many temptations, to which all are exposed, and by which many fall, who venture themselves into the whirl of human affairs; they are exempt from avarice, and all its concomitants, and by allowing themselves to possess nothing, they are free from those contests for honour and power, which fill the open world with stratagems and violence. But surely it cannot be said that they have reached the perfection of a religious Life; it cannot be allowed,

allowed, that flight is victory; or that He fills his place in the Creation laudably, who does no ill, *only* because he does *nothing*. Those who live upon that which is produced by the labour of others, could not live, if there were none to labour; and if Celibacy could be universal, the race of Man must soon have an end.

Of these recluses, it may, without uncharitable censure, be affirmed; that they have secured their innocence, by the loss of their Virtue; that to avoid the commission of some faults, they have made many duties impracticable; and that lest they should do what they ought *not* to do, they leave much *undone*, which they ought to *do*. They must however be allowed, to express a just sense of the dangers, with which we are surrounded; and a strong conviction of the vigilance necessary to obtain salvation; and it is our business to avoid their errors, and imitate their piety.

Ho

He is happy that carries about with him in the world the temper of the cloister; and preserves the fear of doing evil, while he suffers himself to be impelled by the zeal of doing good; who uses the comforts and the conveniences of his condition, as though he used them not, with that constant desire of a better state, which sinks the value of earthly things; who can be rich or poor, without pride in riches, or discontent in poverty; who can manage the business of life, with such indifference, as may shut out from his heart all incitements to fraud or injustice; who can partake the pleasures of sense with temperance, and enjoy the distinctions of honour with moderation; who can pass undefiled through a polluted World; and, among all the vicissitudes of good and evil, have his heart fixed only where true joys are to be found.

This can only be done, by fearing always, by preserving in the mind a constant apprehension of the Divine Presence, and a constant

stant dread of the Divine displeasure; impressions which the converse of mankind, and the sollicitations of sense and fancy, are continually labouring to efface, and which we must therefore renew by all such practices as Religion prescribes; and which may be learned from the lives of them, who have been distinguished, as examples of piety, by the general approbation of the Christian World.

The great efficient of union between the soul and its Creator, is Prayer; of which the necessity is such, that St. Paul directs us, to pray without ceasing; that is, to preserve in the mind such a constant dependence upon God, and such a constant desire of his assistance, as may be equivalent to constant prayer.

No man can pray, with ardour of devotion, but he must excite in himself a reverential idea of that Power, to whom he addresses his petitions; nor can he suddenly reconcile himself to an action, by which he
shall

shall displease him, to whom he has been returning thanks for his Creation and Preservation, and by whom he hopes to be still preserved. He therefore, who prays often, fortifies himself by a natural effect, and may hope to be preserved in safety, by the stronger aid of Divine Protection.

Besides the returns of daily and regular Prayer, it will be necessary for most men to assist themselves, from time to time, by some particular and unaccustomed acts of Devotion. For this purpose, intervals of retirement may be properly recommended; in which the dust of Life may be shaken off, and in which the course of Life may be properly reviewed, and its future possibilities estimated. At such times secular temptations are removed, and earthly cares are dismissed; a vain transitory world may be contemplated in its true state; past offences may obtain pardon by Repentance; new resolutions may be formed, upon new convictions; the past may supply instruction to the present and to the future; and such preparation may be made

made for those events, which threaten spiritual danger, that temptation cannot easily come unexpected ; and interest and pleasure, whenever they renew their attacks, will find the soul upon its guard, with either caution to avoid, or vigour to repel them.

In these seasons of retreat and recollection, what external helps shall be added must by every one be discreetly and soberly considered. Fasts and other austerities, however they have been brought into disrepute by wild Enthusiasm, have been always recommended, and always practised, by the sincere Believers of revealed Religion ; and as they have a natural tendency to disengage the mind from sensuality, they may be of great use, as awakeners of holy Fear ; and they may assist our progress in a good life, while they are considered only as expressions of our love of God, and are not substituted for the love of our Neighbours.

As

As all those duties are to be practised, lest the heart should be hardened, we are to consider,

Secondly, What is meant by *hardness of heart*.

It is apparent from the Text, that the hardness of heart, which betrays to mischief, is contrary to the fear which secures happiness. The fear of God, is a certain tenderness of Spirit, which shrinks from evil, and the causes of evil; such a sense of God's Presence, and such persuasion of his Justice, as gives sin the appearance of evil, and therefore excites every effort to combat and escape it.

Hardness of heart, therefore, is a thoughtless neglect of the Divine Law; such an acquiescence in the pleasures of sense, and such delight in the pride of life, as leaves no place in the mind for meditation on higher things; such an indifference about the last event of
human

human actions, as never looks forward to a future state, but suffers the passions to operate with their full force, without any other end, than the gratifications of the present world.

To Men of hearts thus hardened, Providence is seldom wholly inattentive; they are often called to the remembrance of their Creator, both by blessings and afflictions; by recoveries from sickness, by deliverances from danger, by loss of friends, and by miscarriage of transactions. As these calls are neglected, the hardness is increased; and there is danger, lest he, whom they have refused to hear, should call them no more.

This state of dereliction, is the highest degree of misery; and since it is so much to be dreaded, all approaches to it are diligently to be avoided. It is therefore necessary to enquire,

Thirdly,

Thirdly, How, or by what causes, the heart is hardened.

The most dangerous hardness of heart is that which proceeds from some enormous wickedness, of which the criminal dreads the recollection, because he cannot prevail upon himself to repair the injury; or because he dreads the irruption of those images, by which guilt must always be accompanied; and, finding a temporal ease in negligence and forgetfulness, by degrees confirms himself in stubborn impenitence.

This is the most dreadful and deplorable state of the heart; but this I hope is not very common. That which frequently occurs, though very dangerous, is not desperate; since it consists, not in the perversion of the will, but in the alienation of the thought; by such hearts God is not defied, he is only forgotten. Of this forgetfulness, the general causes are worldly cares and sensual pleasures.

If

If there is a Man, of whose soul avarice or ambition have complete possession, and who places his hope in riches or advancement, he will be employed in bargains, or in schemes, and make no excursion into remote futurity, nor consider the time, in which the rich and the poor shall lie down together ; when all temporal advantages shall forsake him, and he shall appear before the supreme tribunal of Eternal Justice. The slave of pleasure soon sinks into a kind of voluptuous dotage ; intoxicated with present delights, and careless of every thing else ; his days and his nights glide away in luxury or in vice, and he has no cure, but to keep thought away ; for thought is always troublesome to *him*, who lives without his own approbation.

That such men are not roused to the knowledge and the consideration of their real state, will appear less strange ; when it is observed, that they are almost always either stupidly, or profanely, negligent of those external duties of Religion, which are instituted to excite and preserve the fear of God.

F

By

By perpetual absence from publick worship, they miss all opportunities, which the pious wisdom of Christianity has afforded them, of comparing their lives with the rules, which the Scripture contains ; and awakening their attention to the presence of God, by hearing him invoked, and joining their own voices in the common supplication. That carelessness of the world to come, which first suffered them to omit the duties of devotion, is, by that omission, hourly encreased ; and having first neglected the means of holiness, they in time do not remember them.

A great part of them whose hearts are thus hardened, may justly impute that insensibility to the violation of the Sabbath. He that keeps one day in the week holy, has not time to become profligate, before the returning day of recollection reinstates his principles, and renews his caution. This is the benefit of periodical worship. But he, to whom all days are alike, will find *no* day for prayer and repentance.

Many

Many enjoyments, innocent in themselves, may become dangerous by too much frequency; publick spectacles, convivial entertainments, domestick games, sports of the field, or gay or ludicrous conversation; all of them harmless, and some of them useful, while they are regulated by religious prudence, may yet become pernicious, when they pass their bounds, and usurp too much of that time which is given us, that we may work out our Salvation.

And surely whatever may diminish the fear of God, or abate the tenderness of conscience, must be diligently avoided by those, who remember what is to be explained,

Fourthly, The consequence of Hardness of Heart.

He that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief. Whether mischief be considered, as immediately signifying wickedness, or misery, the sense is eventually the same.

Misery is the effect of wickedness, and wickedness is the cause of misery; and he that hardeneth his heart shall be both wicked and miserable. Wicked he will doubtless be, for he that has lost the fear of God has nothing by which he can oppose temptation. He has a breast open and exposed, of which interest or voluptuousness take easy possession. He is the slave of his own desires, and the sport of his own passions. He acts without a rule of action; and he determines, without any true principle of judgement. If he who fears always, who preserves in his mind a constant sense of the danger of sin, is yet often assaulted, and sometimes overpowered, by temptation; what can be hoped for him, that has the same temptation, without the same defence? He who hardens his heart will certainly be wicked, and it necessarily follows, that he will certainly be miserable. The doom of the obstinate and impenitent sinner is plainly declared; it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Let

Let us all therefore watch our thoughts and actions; and that we may not, by hardness of heart, fall into mischief, let us endeavour and pray, that we may be among them that feared always, and by that fear may be prepared for everlasting Happiness.



S E R M O N IV.

ISAIAH, Chap. lviii. Verse 7, 8.

*Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and
that thou bring the poor that are cast out, to
thy house? when thou seest the naked that
thou cover him, and that thou hide not thy-
self from thine own flesh?*

*Then shall thy light break forth as the morning,
and thine health shall spring forth speedily;
and thy righteousness shall go before thee, the
glory of the Lord shall be thy reward.*

IF the necessity of every duty is to be
estimated by the frequency with which
it is inculcated, and the sanctions by which

it is enforced; if the great Lawgiver of the universe, whose will is immutable, and whose decrees are established for ever, may be supposed to regard, in a particular manner, the observation of those commands, which seem to be repeated only that they may be strongly impressed, and secured, by an habitual submission, from violation and neglect, there is scarcely any virtue, that we ought more diligently to exercise than that of compassion to the needy and distressed.

If we look into the state of mankind, and endeavour to deduce the will of God from the visible disposition of things, we find no duty more necessary to the support of order, and the happiness of society, nor any, of which we are more often reminded, by opportunities of practising it, or which is more strongly urged upon us, by importunate solicitations, and affecting objects.

If we enquire into the opinions of those men, on whom God conferred superior wisdom, in the Heathen world, all their suffrages

frages will be found united in this great point. Amidst all their wild opinions, and chimerical systems, the fallies of unguided imagination, and the errours of bewildered reason ; they have all endeavoured to evince the necessity of beneficence, and agreed to assign the first rank of excellence to him, who most contributes to improve the happiness, and to soften the miseries of life.

But we, who are blessed with clearer light, and taught to know the will of our Maker, not from long deductions from variable appearances, or intricate disquisitions of fallible reason, but by messengers inspired by himself, and enabled to prove their mission, by works above the power of created Beings, may spare ourselves the labour of tedious enquiries. The Holy Scriptures are in our hands ; the Scriptures, which are able to make us wise unto Salvation ; and by them we may be sufficiently informed of the extent and importance of this great duty ; a duty enjoined, explained, and enforced, by Moses and the Prophets, by the Evangelists
and

and Apostles, by the precepts of Solomon, and the example of Christ.

From those, to whom large possessions have been transmitted by their ancestors, or whose industry has been blessed with success, God always requires the tribute of Charity; he commands, that what he has given be enjoyed in imitating his bounty, in dispensing happiness, and chearing poverty, in easing the pains of disease, and lightening the burthen of oppression; he commands that the superfluity of bread be dealt to the hungry; and the raiment, which the possessor cannot use, be bestowed upon the naked, and that no man turn away from his own flesh.

This is a tribute, which it is difficult to imagine that any man can be unwilling to pay, as an acknowledgement of his dependence upon the universal Benefactor, and an humble testimony of his confidence in that protection, without which, the strongest foundations of human power must fail, at the first shock of adversity, and the highest
 I
 fabricks

fabricks of earthly greatness sink into ruin ; without which, wealth is only a floating vapour, and policy an empty found.

But such is the prevalence of temptations, not early resisted ; such the depravity of minds, by which unlawful desires have been long indulged, and false appearances of happiness pursued with ardour and pertinaciousness ; so much are we influenced by example, and so diligently do we labour to deceive ourselves, that it is not uncommon to find the sentiments of benevolence almost extinguished, and all regard to the welfare of others overborne by a perpetual attention to immediate advantage and contracted views of present interest.

When any man has sunk into a state of insensibility like this, when he has learned to act only by the impulse of apparent profit, when he can look upon distress, without partaking it, and hear the cries of poverty and sickness, without a wish to relieve them ; when he has so far disordered his ideas as to
value

value wealth, without regard to its end, and to amass, with eagerness, what is of no use in his hands ; he is indeed not easily to be reclaimed ; his reason, as well as his passions, is in combination against his soul, and there is little hope, that either persuasion will soften, or arguments convince him. A man, once hardened in cruelty by inveterate avarice, is scarcely to be considered as any longer human ; nor is it to be hoped, that any impression can be made upon him, by methods applicable only to reasonable Beings. Beneficence and compassion can be awakened in such hearts only by the operation of Divine Grace, and must be the effect of a miracle, like that which turned the dry rock into a springing well.

Let every one, that considers this state of obdurate wickedness, that is struck with horror at the mention of a man void of pity, that feels resentment at the name of oppression, and melts with sorrow at the voice of misery, remember that those, who have now lost all these sentiments, were originally
formed

formed with passions, and instincts, and reason, like his own : let him reflect, that he, who now stands most firmly, may fall by negligence, and that negligence arises from security. Let him therefore observe, by what gradations men sink into perdition, by what insensible deviations they wander from the ways of virtue, 'till they are at length scarce able to return ; and let him be warned by their example, to avoid the original causes of depravity, and repel the first attacks of unreasonable self-love ; let him meditate on the excellence of Charity, and improve those seeds of benevolence, which are implanted in every mind, but which will not produce fruit, without care and cultivation.

Such meditations are always necessary for the promotion of Virtue ; for a careless and inattentive mind easily forgets its importance, and it will be practised only with a degree of ardour, proportioned to the sense of our obligations to it.

To

To assist such reflections, to confirm the benevolence of the liberal, and to show those who have lived without regard to the necessities of others, the absurdity of their conduct, I shall enquire,

First, Into the nature of Charity ; and

Secondly, Into the advantages arising from the exercise of it.

First, I shall enquire into the nature of Charity.

By Charity, is to be understood, every assistance of weakness, or supply of wants, produced by a desire of benefiting others, and of pleasing God. Not every act of liberality, every increase of the wealth of another, not every flow of negligent profusions, or thoughtless start of sudden munificence, is to be dignified with this venerable name. There are many motives to the appearance of bounty, very different from those of true Charity, and
which,

which, with whatever success they may be imposed upon Mankind, will be distinguished at the last day by Him to whom all hearts are open. It is not impossible, that Men whose chief desire is esteem and applause, who court the favour of the multitude, and think fame the great end of action, may squander their wealth in such a manner, that some part of it may benefit the virtuous or the miserable; but as the Guilt, so the Virtue, of every action, arises from design; and those blessings which are bestowed by chance, will be of very little advantage to him that scattered them, with no other prospect, than that of hearing his own praises; praises, of which he will not be often disappointed, but of which our Lord has determined, that they shall be his reward. If any Man, in the distribution of his favours, finds the desire of engaging gratitude, or gaining affection, to predominate in his mind; if he finds his benevolence weakened, by observing that his favours are forgotten, and that those whom he has most studiously benefited, are often least zealous for his service; he ought to remember,

member, that he is not acting upon the proper motives of Charity. For true Charity arises from faith in the promises of God, and expects rewards only in a future state. To hope for our recompence in this life, is not beneficence, but usury.

And surely Charity may easily subsist, without temporal motives, when it is considered, that it is by the exercise of Charity alone, that we are enabled to receive any solid advantage from present prosperity, and to appropriate to ourselves any possession, beyond the possibility of losing it. Of the uncertainty of success, and the instability of greatness, we have examples every day before us. Scarcely can any Man turn his eyes upon the World, without observing the sudden rotations of affairs, the ruin of the affluent, and the downfall of the high; and it may reasonably be hoped, that no Man, to whom opportunities of such observations occur, can forbear applying them to his own condition, and reflecting, that what he
now

now contemplates in another, he may, in a few days, experience himself.

By these reflections, he must be naturally led to enquire, how he may fix such fugitive advantages; how he shall hinder his wealth from flying away, and leaving him nothing, but melancholy, disappointment, and remorse. This he can effect only, by the practice of Charity, by dealing his bread to the hungry, and bringing the poor that is cast out, to his house. By these means only he can lay up for himself treasures in Heaven, *where neither rust nor moth doth corrupt, and where Thieves do not break through and steal.* By a liberal distribution of his riches, he can place them above the reach of the spoiler, and exempt them from accident and danger; can purchase to himself that satisfaction which no power on earth can take away; and make them the means of happiness, when they are no longer in his hands. He may procure, by this use of his wealth, what he will find to be obtained by no other method of applying it, an alleviation of the

torrows of age, of the pains of sickness, and of the agonies of death.

To enforce the duty of Charity, it is so far from being necessary to produce any arguments, drawn from a narrow view of our condition, a view restrained to this world, that the chief reason for which it is to be practised, is the shortness and uncertainty of life. To a man who considers, for what purpose he was created, and why he was placed in his present state, how short a time, at most, is allotted to his earthly duration, and how much of that time may be cut off; how can any thing give real satisfaction, that terminates in this life? How can he imagine, that any acquisition can deserve his labour, which has no tendency to the perfection of his mind? Or how can any enjoyment engage his desires, but that of a pure conscience, and reasonable expectations of a more happy and permanent existence? Whatever superiority may distinguish us, and whatever plenty may surround us, we know, that they can be possessed but a short time, and that the manner

manner in which we employ them must determine our eternal state ; and what need can there be of any other argument for the use of them, agreeable to the command of him that bestowed them ? What stronger incitement can any man require to a due consideration of the poor and needy, than that the Lord will deliver him in the day of trouble ; in that day, when the shadow of death shall compass him about, and all the vanities of the world shall fade away ; when all the comforts of this life shall forsake him, when pleasure shall no longer delight, nor power protect him ? In that dreadful hour, shall the man, whose care has been extended to the general happiness of mankind, whose Charity has rescued sickness from the grave, and poverty from the dungeon, who has heard the groans of the aged, struggling with misfortunes, and the cries of infants languishing with hunger, find favour in the sight of the great Authour of society, and his recompence shall flow upon him, from the fountain of mercy ; he shall stand without fear, on the brink of life, and pass into eter-

nity, with an humble confidence of finding that mercy which he has never denied. His Righteousness shall go before him, and the Glory of the Lord shall be his re-reward.

These blessings, and these rewards, are to be gained by the due use of riches; but they are not confined to the rich, or unattainable by those whom Providence has placed in lower stations. Charity is an universal duty, which it is in every man's power sometimes to practise; since every degree of assistance given to another, upon proper motives, is an act of Charity; and there is scarcely any man, in such a state of imbecillity, as that he may not, on some occasions, benefit his neighbour. He that cannot relieve the poor, may instruct the ignorant; and he that cannot attend the sick, may reclaim the vicious. He that can give little assistance himself, may yet perform the duty of Charity, by inflaming the ardour of others, and recommending the petitions, which he cannot grant, to those who have more to bestow. The widow that shall give her mite to the treasury, the
poor

poor man who shall bring to the thirsty a cup of cold water, shall not lose their reward.

And that this reward is not without reason decreed to the beneficent, and that the duty of Charity is not exalted above its natural dignity and importance, will appear, by considering,

Secondly, The benefits arising from the exercise of Charity.

The chief advantage which is received by mankind from the practice of Charity, is the promotion of Virtue, amongst those, who are most exposed to such temptations as it is not easy to surmount; temptations, of which no man can say, that he should be able to resist them, and of which it is not easy for any one that has not known them, to estimate the force, and represent the danger.

We see, every day, men blessed with abundance, and revelling in delight, yet overborne

by ungovernable desires of increasing their acquisitions; and breaking through the boundaries of Religion, to pile heaps on heaps, and add one superfluity to another, to obtain only nominal advantages, and imaginary pleasures.

For these we see Friendships broken, Justice violated, and Nature forgotten; we see crimes committed, without the prospect of obtaining any positive pleasure, or removing any real pain. We see men toiling through meanness and guilt, to obtain that which they can enjoy only in idea, and which will supply them with nothing real, which they do not already abundantly possess.

If men formed by education and enlightened by experience, men whose observations of the world cannot but have shown them the necessity of Virtue, and who are able to discover the enormity of wickedness, by tracing its original, and pursuing its consequences, can fall before such temptations, and, in opposition to knowledge and conviction,

I

prefer

prefer to the happiness of pleasing God, the flatteries of dependants, or the smiles of power ; what may not be expected from him, who is pushed forward into sin by the impulse of poverty, who lives in continual want of what he sees wasted by thousands in negligent extravagance, and whose pain is every moment aggravated by the contempt of those whom nature has subjected to the same necessities with himself, and who are only his superior by that wealth which they know not how to possess with moderation or decency ?

How strongly may such a man be tempted to declare war upon the prosperous and the great ! With what obstinacy and fury may he rush on from one outrage to another, impelled on one part, by the pressure of necessity, and attracted on the other, by the prospect of happiness: of happiness, which he sees sufficient to elevate those that possess it above the consideration of their own nature, and to turn them away from their own flesh ; that happiness, which appears greater,

by being compared with his own misery, and which he admires the more, because he cannot approach it. He that finds in himself every natural power of enjoyment, will envy the tables of the luxurious, and the splendour of the proud; he who feels the cold of nakedness, and the faintness of hunger, cannot but be provoked to snatch that bread which is devoured by excess, and that raiment which is only worn as the decoration of vanity. Resentment may easily combine with want, and incite him to return neglect with violence.

Such are the temptations of poverty; and who is there that can say, that he has not sometimes forsaken virtue upon weaker motives? Let any man reflect upon the snares to which Poverty exposes virtue, and remember, how certainly one crime makes way for another, till at last all distinction of good and evil is obliterated; and he will easily discover the necessity of Charity, to preserve a great part of mankind from the most atrocious wickedness.

The

The great rule of action, by which we are directed to do to others whatever we would that others should do to us, may be extended to God himself; whatever we ask of God, we ought to be ready to bestow on our neighbour; if we pray to be forgiven, we must forgive those that trespass against us; and is it not equally reasonable, when we implore from Providence our daily bread, that we deal our bread to the hungry; and that we rescue others from being betrayed by want into sin, when we pray, that we may not ourselves be led into temptation?

Poverty, for the greatest part, produces ignorance, and ignorance facilitates the attack of temptation. For how should any man resist the sollicitations of appetite, or the influence of passion, without any sense of their guilt, or dread of the punishment? How should he avoid the paths of vice, who never was directed to the way of virtue?

For

For this reason, no method of charity is more efficacious than that which at once enlightens ignorance and relieves poverty, that implants virtue in the mind, and wards off the blasts of indigence that might destroy it in the bloom. Such is the charity of which an opportunity is now offered; charity, by which those, who would probably, without assistance, be the burthens or terrors of the community by growing up in idleness and vice, are enabled to support themselves by useful employments, and glorify God by reasonable service.

Such are the general motives which the Religion of Jesus affords to the general exercise of charity, and such are the particular motives for our laying hold of the opportunity, which Providence has this day put into our power for the practice of it; motives no less than the hope of everlasting happiness, and the fear of punishment which shall never end. Such incitements are surely sufficient to quicken the slowest,

est, and animate the coldest; and if there can be imagined any place in which they must be more eminently prevalent, it must be the * place where we now reside. The numerous Frequenters of this place constitute a mixed assemblage of the happy and the miserable. Part of this audience has resorted hither, to alleviate the miseries of sickness, and part, to divert the satiety of pleasure; part, because they are disabled, by diseases, to prosecute the employment of their station; and part, because their station has allotted them, in their own opinion, no other business than to pursue their pleasures. Part have exhausted the medicines, and part have worn out the delights of every other place; and these contrary conditions are so mingled together, that in few places are the miseries of life so severely felt, or its pleasures more luxuriously enjoyed.

To each of these states of life may the precepts of Charity be enforced with eminent

* Bath.

propriety,

propriety, and unanswerable arguments. Those, whose only complaint is a surfeit of felicity, and whose fearless and confident gaiety brings them hither, rather to waste health than to repair it, cannot surely be so intent upon the constant succession of amusements which vanity and affluence have provided, as not sometimes to turn their thoughts upon those whom poverty and ignorance have cut off from enjoyment, and consigned a prey to wickedness, to misery, and to want. If their amusements afford them the satisfaction which the eager repetition of them seems to declare, they must certainly pity those who live in sight of so much happiness, which they can only view from a distance, but can never reach; and those whom they pity, they cannot surely hear the promises made to charity without endeavouring to relieve. But if, as the wisest among the votaries of pleasure have confessed, they feel themselves unsatisfied and deluded; if, as they own, their ardour is kept up by dissimulation, and they lay aside their appearance of felicity, when they

they retire from the eyes of those among whom they desire to propagate the deceit; if they feel that they have wasted life without possessing it; and know that they shall rise to-morrow, to chase an empty good which they have often grasped at, but could never hold: they may surely spare something for the purchase of solid satisfaction, and cut off part of that expence, by which nothing is procured, for the sake of giving to others those necessities which the common wants of our Being demand, and by the distribution of which they may lay up some treasures of happiness against that day which is stealing upon them, the day of age, of sickness and of death, in which they shall be able to reflect with pleasure on no other part of their time past here, but that which was spent in the duties of Charity. But if these shall harden their dispositions, if these shall withhold their hands, let them not amuse themselves with the general excuses; or dream that any plea of inability will be accepted from those who squander wealth upon trifles, and trust sums,
that

that might relieve the wants of multitudes, to the skill of play, and the uncertainties of chance.

To those to whom languishment and sickness have shewn the instability of all human happiness, I hope it will not be requisite to enforce the necessity of securing to themselves a state of unshaken security, and unchangeable enjoyment. To inculcate the shortness of life to those who feel hourly decays; or to expatiate on the miseries of disease and poverty to them, whom pain perhaps, at this instant, is dragging to the grave, would be a needless waste of that time which their condition admonishes them to spend, not in hearing, but in practising their duty. And of sickness, Charity seems the peculiar employment, because it is an act of piety which can be practised with such slight and transient attention as pain and faintness may allow. To the sick therefore I may be allowed to pronounce the last summons to this mighty work, which perhaps the Divine Providence will allow them to hear. Remember

member thou ! that now faintest under the weight of long-continued maladies, that to thee, more emphatically, the night cometh in which no man can work ; and therefore say not to him that asketh thee, " Go away now, and to-morrow I will give ; " To-morrow ? To-morrow is to *all* uncertain, to *thee* almost hopeless ; to-day if thou wilt hear the voice of God calling thee to repentance, and by repentance to charity ; harden not thy heart, but what thou knowest that in thy last moment thou shalt wish done, make haste to do, lest thy last moment be now upon thee.

And let us all, at all times, and in all places, remember, that they who have given food to the hungry, raiment to the naked, and instruction to the ignorant, shall be numbered by the Son of God, amongst the Blessed of the Father.

SER-

S E R M O N V.

NEHEMIAH, Chap. ix. Verse 33.

Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us, for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly.

THERE is nothing upon which more Writers, in all ages, have laid out their abilities, than the miseries of life ; and it affords no pleasing reflections to discover that a subject so little agreeable is not yet exhausted.

VOL. I.

H

Some

Some have endeavoured to engage us in the contemplation of the evils of life for a very wise and good end. They have proposed, by laying before us the uncertainty of prosperity, the vanity of pleasure, and the inquietudes of power, the difficult attainment of most earthly blessings, and the short duration of them all, to divert our thoughts from the glittering follies and tempting delusions that surround us, to an enquiry after more certain and permanent felicity; felicity not subject to be interrupted by sudden vicissitudes, or impaired by the malice of the revengeful, the caprice of the inconstant, or the envy of the ambitious. They have endeavoured to demonstrate, and have in reality demonstrated to all those who will steal a few moments from noise and show, and luxury, to attend to reason and to truth, that nothing is worthy of our ardent wishes, or intense solicitude, that terminates in this state of existence, and that those only make the true use of life, that employ it in obtaining the

the favour of God, and securing everlasting happiness.

Others have taken occasion from the dangers that surround, and the troubles that perplex us, to dispute the wisdom or justice of the Governour of the world, or to murmur at the laws of Divine Providence; as the present state of the world, the disorder and confusion of every thing about us, the casual and certain evils to which we are exposed, and the disquiet and disgust which either accompany, or follow, those few pleasures that are within our reach, seem, in their opinion, to carry no marks of infinite benignity. This has been the reasoning by which the wicked and profligate, in all ages, have attempted to harden their hearts against the reproaches of conscience, and delude others into a participation of their crimes. By this argument weak minds have been betrayed into doubts and distrust, and decoyed by degrees into a dangerous state of suspense, though perhaps never betrayed to absolute infidelity. For few men have been made

infidels by argument and reflection; their actions are not generally the result of their reasonings, but their reasonings of their actions. Yet these reasonings, though they are not strong enough to pervert a good mind, may yet, when they coincide with interest, and are assisted by prejudice, contribute to confirm a man, already corrupted, in his impieties, and at least retard his reformation, if not entirely obstruct it.

Besides, notions, thus derogatory from the providence of God, tend, even in the best men, if not timely eradicated, to weaken those impressions of reverence and gratitude, which are necessary to add warmth to his devotions, and vigour to his virtue; for as the force of corporeal motion is weakened by every obstruction, though it may not be entirely overcome by it, so the operations of the mind are by every false notion impeded and embarrassed, and though they are not wholly diverted or suppressed, proceed at least with less regularity, and with less celerity.

But

But these doubts may easily be removed, and these arguments confuted, by a calm and impartial attention to Religion and to reason; it will appear upon examination, that though the world be full of misery and disorder, yet God is not to be charged with disregard of his creation; that, if we suffer, we suffer by our own fault, and that *he has done right, but we have done wickedly.*

We are informed by the Scriptures, that God is not the Authour of our present state, that, when he created man, he created him for happiness; happiness indeed dependant upon his own choice, and to be preserved by his own conduct; for such must necessarily be the happiness of every reasonable Being: that this happiness was forfeited by a breach of the conditions to which it was annexed, and that the posterity of him that broke the covenant were involved in the consequences of his fault. Thus Religion shews us that physical and moral evil entered the world together; and reason and experience assure us,

that they continue for the most part so closely united, that, to avoid misery, we must avoid sin, and that, while it is in our power to be virtuous, it is in our power to be happy, at least to be happy to such a degree as may have little room for murmur and complaints.

Complaints are doubtless irrational in themselves, and unjust with respect to God, if the remedies of the evils we lament are in our hands ; for what more can be expected from the beneficence of our Creatour, than that he should place good and evil before us, and then direct us in our choice ?

That God has not been sparing of his bounties to mankind, or left them, even since the original transgression of his command, in a state so calamitous as discontent and melancholy have represented it, will evidently appear, if we reflect,

First, How few of the evils of life can justly be ascribed to God.

Secondly,

Secondly, How far a general Piety might exempt any Community from those evils.

Thirdly, How much, in the present corrupt state of the world, particular men may, by the practice of the duties of Religion, promote their own happiness.

First, How few of the evils of life can justly be ascribed to God.

In examining what part of our present misery is to be imputed to God, we must carefully distinguish that which is actually appointed by him, from that which is only permitted, or that which is the consequence of something done by ourselves, and could not be prevented, but by the interruption of those general and settled laws, which we term the course of nature, or the established order of the universe. Thus it is decreed by God, that all men should die ; and therefore the death of each man may justly be ascribed to God ; but the circumstances and time of

his death are very much in his own power, or in the power of others. When a good man falls by the hand of an assassin, or is condemned by the testimony of false witnesses, or the sentence of a corrupt judge; his death may, in some measure, be called the work of God, but his murder is the action of men. That he was mortal is the effect of the divine decree; but that he was deprived of life unjustly, is the crime of his enemies.

If we examine all the afflictions of mind, body, and estate, by this rule, we shall find God not otherwise necessary to them, than as he works no miracles to prevent them, as he suffers men to be masters of themselves, and restrains them only by coercions applied to their reason. If God should, by a particular exertion of his Omnipotence, hinder murder or oppression, no man could then be a murderer or an oppressor, because he would be withheld from it by an irresistible power; but then that power, which prevented crimes, would destroy Virtue; for Virtue is the consequence of choice. Men would be no longer
rational,

rational, or would be rational to no purpose, because their actions would not be the result of free-will, determined by moral motives ; but the settled and predestined motions of a machine impelled by necessity.

Thus it appears, that God would not act as the Governour of rational and moral agents, if he should lay any other restraints upon them, than the hope of rewards, or fear of punishments ; and that to destroy, or obviate the consequences of human actions, would be to destroy the present constitution of the world.

When therefore any man suffers pain from an injury offered him, that pain is not the act of God, but the effect of a crime, to which his enemy was determined by his own choice. He was created susceptible of pain, but not necessarily subjected to that particular injury which he now feels, and he is therefore not to charge God with his afflictions. The materials for building are naturally combustible ; but when a city is fired by incendiaries,

diaries, God is not the authour of its destruction.

God may indeed, by special acts of Providence, sometimes hinder the designs of bad men from being successfully executed, or the execution of them from producing such consequences as it naturally tends to; but this, whenever it is done, is a real, though not always a visible miracle, and is not to be expected in the ordinary occurrences of life, or the common transactions of the world.

In making an estimate therefore of the miseries that arise from the disorders of the body, we must consider how many diseases proceed from our own laziness, intemperance, or negligence; how many the vices or follies of our ancestors have transmitted to us, and beware of imputing to God the consequences of luxury, riot, and debauchery.

There are indeed distempers, which no caution can secure us from, and which appear to be more immediately the strokes of
Heaven;

Heaven ; but these are not of the most painful or lingering kind, they are for the most part acute and violent, and quickly terminate, either in recovery, or death ; and it is always to be remembered, that nothing but wickedness makes death an evil.

Nor are the disquietudes of the mind less frequently excited by ourselves. Pride is the general source of our infelicity. A man that has an high opinion of his own merits, of the extent of his capacity, of the depth of his penetration, and the force of his eloquence, naturally forms schemes of employment, and promotion, adequate to those abilities he conceives himself possessed of ; he exacts from others the same esteem which he pays to himself, and imagines his deserts disregarded, if they are not rewarded to the extent of his wishes. He claims more than he has a right to hope for, finds his exorbitant demands rejected, retires to obscurity and melancholy, and charges Heaven with his disappointments.

Men

Men are very seldom disappointed, except when their desires are immoderate, or when they suffer their passions to overpower their reason, and dwell upon delightful scenes of future honours, power, or riches, till they mistake probabilities for certainties, or wild wishes for rational expectations. If such men, when they awake from these voluntary dreams, find the pleasing phantom vanish away ; what can they blame but their own folly ?

With no greater reason can we impute to Providence the fears and anxieties that harass and distract us ; for they arise from too close an adherence to those things, from which we are commanded to disengage our affections. We fail of being happy, because we determine to obtain felicity by means different from those which God hath appointed. We are forbidden to be too solicitous about future events ; and is the Author of that prohibition to be accused, because men
make

make themselves miserable by disregarding it?

Poverty indeed is not always the effect of wickedness, it may often be the consequence of Virtue; but it is not certain that poverty is an evil. If we exempt the poor man from all the miseries to which his condition exposes him from the wickedness of others, if we secure him from the cruelty of oppression, and the contumelies of pride; if we suppose him to rate no enjoyment of this life, beyond its real and intrinsic value; and to indulge no desire more than reason and Religion allow; the inferiority of his station will very little diminish his happiness; and therefore the poverty of the virtuous reflects no reproach upon Providence. But poverty, like many other miseries of life, is often little more than an imaginary calamity. Men often call themselves poor, not because they want necessaries, but because they have not more than they want. This indeed is not always the case, nor ought we ever to harden our hearts against the cries of those
who

who implore our assistance, by supposing that they feel less than they express; but let us all relieve the necessitous according to our abilities, and real poverty will soon be banished out of the world.

To these general heads may be reduced almost all the calamities that imbitter the life of man. To enumerate particular evils would be of little use. It is evident that most of our miseries are, either imaginary, or the consequences, either of our own faults, or the faults of others; and that it is therefore worthy of enquiry,

Secondly, How far a general piety might exempt any community from these evils.

It is an observation very frequently made, that there is more tranquillity and satisfaction diffused through the inhabitants of uncultivated and savage countries, than is to be met with in nations filled with wealth and plenty, polished with civility, and governed by laws. It is found happy to be free from contention, though that exemption be obtained by having

ing nothing to contend for; and an equality of condition, though that condition be far from eligible, conduces more to the peace of society, than an established and legal subordination; in which every man is perpetually endeavouring to, exalt himself to the rank above him, though by degrading others already in possession of it; and every man exerting his efforts, to hinder his inferiors from rising to the level with himself. It appears that it is better to have no property, than to be in perpetual apprehensions of fraudulent artifices, or open invasions; and that the security arising from a regular administration of government, is not equal to that which is produced by the absence of ambition, envy, or discontent.

Thus pleasing is the prospect of savage countries, merely from the ignorance of Vice, even without the knowledge of Virtue; thus happy are they, amidst all the hardships and distresses that attend a state of Nature, because they are in a great measure free
from

from those which men bring upon one another.

But a community, in which Virtue should generally prevail, of which every member should fear God with his whole heart, and love his neighbour as himself, where every man should labour to make himself *perfect*, *even as his Father which is in Heaven is perfect*, and endeavour with his utmost diligence to imitate the divine justice and benevolence, would have no reason to envy those nations, whose quiet is the effect of their ignorance.

If we consider it with regard to publick happiness, it would be opulent without luxury, and powerful without faction; its counsels would be steady, because they would be just; and its efforts vigorous because they would be united. The governours would have nothing to fear from the turbulence of the people, nor the people any thing to apprehend from the ambition of their governours. The encroachments of foreign enemies, they
could

could not always avoid, but would certainly repulse, for scarcely any civilized nation has been ever enslaved, till it was first corrupted.

With regard to private men, not only that happiness, which necessarily descends to particulars from the publick prosperity, would be enjoyed ; but even those blessings, which constitute the felicity of domestick life, and are less closely connected with the general good. Every man would be industrious to improve his property, because he would be in no danger of seeing his improvements torn from him. Every man would assist his neighbour, because he would be certain of receiving assistance, if he should himself be attacked by necessity. Every man would endeavour after merit, because merit would always be rewarded. Every tie of friendship and relation would add to happiness, because it would not be subject to be broken by envy, rivalry, or suspicion. Children would honour their parents, because all parents would be virtuous ; all parents would love their

children, because all children would be obedient. The grief which we naturally feel at the death of those that are dear to us, could not perhaps be wholly prevented, but would be much more moderate than in the present state of things, because no man could ever want a friend, and his loss would therefore be less, because his grief, like his other passions, would be regulated by his duty. Even the relations of subjection would produce no uneasiness, because insolence would be separated from power, and discontent from inferiority. Difference of opinions would never disturb this community, because every man would dispute for truth alone, look upon the ignorance of others with compassion, and reclaim them from their errors with tenderness and modesty. Persecution would not be heard of among them, because there would be no pride on one side, nor obstinacy on the other. Disputes about property would seldom happen, because no man would grow rich by injuring another; and, when they did happen, they would be quickly terminated,

terminated, because each party would be equally desirous of a just sentence. All care and solicitude would be almost banished from this happy region, because no man would either have false friends, or publick enemies. The immoderate desire of riches would be extinguished, where there was no vanity to be gratified. The fear of poverty would be dispelled, where there was no man suffered to want what was necessary to his support, or proportioned to his deserts. Such would be the state of a community generally virtuous, and this happiness would probably be derived to future generations; since the earliest impressions would be in favour of virtue, since those, to whom the care of education should be committed, would make themselves venerable by the observation of their own precepts, and the minds of the young and unexperienced would not be tainted with false notions, nor their conduct influenced by bad examples.

Such is the state at which any community may arrive by the general practice of the duties of Religion. And can Providence be accused of cruelty or negligence, when such happiness as this is within our power? Can man be said to have received his existence as a punishment, or a curse, when he may attain such a state as this; when even this is only preparatory to greater happiness, and the same course of life will secure him from misery, both in this world and in a future state?

Let no man charge this prospect of things with being a train of airy phantoms; a visionary scene, with which a gay imagination may be amused in solitude and ease, but which the first survey of the world will shew him to be nothing more than a pleasing delusion. Nothing has been mentioned which would not certainly be produced in any nation by a general piety. To effect all this, no miracle is required; men need only unite their endeavours, and exert those abilities which

which God has conferred upon them, in conformity to the laws of Religion.

To general happiness, indeed, is required a general concurrence in virtue; but we are not to delay the amendment of our own lives, in expectation of this favourable juncture. An universal reformation must be begun somewhere, and every man ought to be ambitious of being the first. He that does not promote it, retards it; for every man must, by his conversation, do either good or hurt. Let every man, therefore, endeavour to make the world happy, by a strict performance of his duty to God and man, and the mighty work will soon be accomplished.

Governours have yet a harder task; they have not only their own actions, but those of others, to regulate, and are not only chargeable with their own faults, but with all those which they neglect to prevent or punish. As they are intrusted with the government for the sake of the people, they are under

the strongest obligations to advance their happiness, which they can only do by the encouragement of virtue.

But since the care of governours may be frustrated, since publick happiness, which must be the result of publick virtue, seems to be at a great distance from us, let us consider,

Thirdly, How much in the present corrupt state of the world, particular men may, by the practice of the duties of Religion, promote their own happiness.

He is very ignorant of the nature of happiness, who imagines it to consist wholly in the outward circumstances of life, which being in themselves transient and variable, and generally dependant upon the will of others, can never be the true basis of a solid satisfaction. To be wealthy, to be honoured, to be loved, or to be feared, is not always to be happy. The man who considers himself as a Being accountable to God, as a Being
sent

sent into the world only to secure immortal happiness by his obedience to those laws which he has received from his Creatour, will not be very solicitous about his present condition, which will soon give way to a state permanent and unchangeable, in which nothing will avail him but his innocence, or disturb him but his crimes. While this reflection is predominant in the mind, all the good and evil of life sinks into nothing. While he presses forward towards eternal felicity, honours and reproaches are equally contemptible. If he be injured, he will soon cease to feel the wrong; if he be calumniated, the day is coming in which all the nations of the earth, and all the Host of Heaven, shall be witnesses of his justification. If his friends forsake, or betray him, he alleviates his concern, by considering, that the divine promises are never broken, and that the favour of God can only be forfeited by his own fault. In all his calamities he remembers, that it is in his own power to make them subservient to his own advantage, and that patience is one of those virtues which

he is commanded to practise, and which God has determined to reward. That man can never be miserable to whom persecution is a blessing; nor can his tranquillity be interrupted, who places all his happiness in his prospect of eternity.

Thus it appears, that by the practice of our duty, even our present state may be made pleasing and desirable; and that if we languish under calamities, they are brought upon us, not by the immediate hand of Providence, but by our own folly and disobedience; that happiness will be diffused, as virtue prevails; and *that God has done right, but we have done wickedly.*



SERMON

S E R M O N VI.

PROVERBS, Chap. xii. Verse 2.

*When Pride cometh, then cometh Shame, but
with the Lowly is Wisdom.*

THE writings of Solomon are filled with such observations upon the nature and life of man, as were the result of long experience, assisted with every advantage of mind and fortune; an experience that had made him acquainted with the actions, passions,

sions, virtues, and vices of all ranks, ages, and denominations of mankind, and enabled him, with the divine assistance, to leave to succeeding ages a collection of precepts that, if diligently attended to, will conduct us safe in the paths of life.

Of the ancient sages of the Heathen world, so often talked of, and so loudly applauded, there is recorded little more than single maxims, which they comprized in few words, and often inculcated; for these they were honoured by their contemporaries, and still continue revered and admired; nor would it either be justice or gratitude to depreciate their characters, since every discoverer, or propagator, of truth, is undoubtedly a benefactor to the world. But surely if single sentences could procure them the epithet of *wise*, Solomon may, for this collection of important counsels, *justly claim the title of the wisest amongst the sons of men.*

Among all the vices against which he has cautioned us (and he has scarcely left one untouched),

touched), there is none upon which he animadvert with more severity, or to which he more frequently recalls our attention, by reiterated reflections, than the vice of *pride*; for which there may be many reasons assigned, but, more particularly, two seem to deserve our consideration; the first drawn from the extensiveness of the sin; the other from the circumstances of the Preacher.

The first is the extensiveness of the sin.

Pride is a corruption that seems almost originally ingrafted in our nature; it exerts itself in our first years, and, without continual endeavours to suppress it, influences our last. Other vices tyrannize over particular ages, and triumph in particular countries. Rage is the failing of youth, and avarice of age; revenge is the predominant passion of one country, and inconstancy the characteristick of another; but pride is the native of every country, infects every climate, and corrupts every nation. It ranges equally through the gardens of the east, and the desarts of the south,

footh, and reigns no lefs in the cavern of the Savage, than in the palace of the Epicure. It mingles with all our other vices, and without the moft conftant and anxious care will mingle alfo with our virtues. It is no wonder, therefore, that Solomon fo frequently directs us to avoid this fault, to which we are all fo liable, fince nothing is more agreeable to reafon, than that precepts of the moft general ufe fhould be moft frequently inculcated.

The fecond reafon may be drawn from the circumftances of the Preacher.

Pride was probably a crime to which Solomon himfelf was moft violently tempted; and indeed it might have been much more eafily imagined, that he would have fallen into this fin, than into fome others, of which he was guilty, fince he was placed in every circumftance that could expofe him to it. He was a king abfolute and independent, and by confequence furrounded with fycophants ready to fecond the firft motions of felf-love, and

and blow the sparks of vanity ; to echo all the applauses, and suppress all the murmurs of the people ; to comply with every proposal, and flatter every failing. These are tempters to which kings have been always exposed, and whose snares few kings have been able to overcome.

But Solomon had not only the pride of royalty to suppress, but the pride of prosperity, of knowledge, and of wealth ; each of them able to subdue the virtue of most men, to intoxicate their minds, and hold their reason in captivity. Well might Solomon more diligently warn us against a sin which had assaulted *him* in so many different forms. Could any superiority to the rest of the world make pride excusable, it might have been pardoned in Solomon ; but he has been so far from allowing it either in himself or others, that he has left a perpetual attestation in favour of humility, *that where Pride cometh, there cometh Shame, but with the Lowly is Wisdom.*

This

This assertion I shall endeavour to explain and confirm,

First, by considering the nature of pride in general, with its attendants and consequences.

Secondly, by examining some of the usual motives to pride; and shewing how little can be pleaded in excuse of it.

Thirdly, by shewing the amiableness and excellence of humility.

First, by considering in general the nature of pride, with its attendants and consequences.

Pride, simply considered, is an immoderate degree of self-esteem, or an over-value set upon a man by himself, and, like most other vices, is founded originally on an intellectual falsehood. But this definition sets this vice in the fairest light, and separates it from

from all its consequences, by considering man without relation to society, and independent of all outward circumstances. Pride, thus defined, is only the seed of that complicated sin against which we are cautioned in the text. It is the pride of a solitary being, and the subject of scholastick disquisitions, not of a practical discourse.

In speculation, pride may be considered as ending where it began, and exerting no influences beyond the bosom in which it dwells; but in real life and the course of affairs, pride will always be attended with kindred passions, and produce effects equally injurious to others, and destructive to itself.

He that overvalues himself will undervalue others, and he that undervalues others will oppress them. To this fancied superiority it is owing, that tyrants have squandered the lives of millions, and looked unconcerned on the miseries of war. It is indeed scarcely credible, it would without experience be absolutely

solutely incredible, that a man should carry destruction and slaughter round the world, lay cities in ashes, and put nations to the sword, without one pang or one tear ; that we should feel no reluctance at seizing the possessions of another, at robbing parents of their children, and shortening or imbittering innumerable lives. Yet this fatal, this dreadful effect, has pride been able to produce. Pride has been able to harden the heart against compassion, and stop the ears against the cries of misery.

In this manner does pride operate, when unhappily united with power and dominion ; and has, in the lower ranks of mankind, similar, though not equal, effects. It makes masters cruel and imperious, and magistrates insolent and partial. It produces contempt and injuries, and dissolves the bond of society.

Nor is this species of pride more hurtful to the world, than destructive to itself. The oppressor unites Heaven and Earth against him

him ; if a private man, he at length becomes the object of universal hatred and reproach ; and if a prince, the neighbouring monarchs combine to his ruin. So that *when pride cometh, then cometh shame ; but with the lowly is wisdom.*

He that sets too high a value upon his own merits, will of course think them ill rewarded with his present condition. He will endeavour to exalt his fortune, and his rank above others, in proportion as his deserts are superiour to theirs. He will conceive his virtues obscured by his fortune, lament that his great abilities lie useles and unobserved for want of a sphere of action, in which he might exert them in their full extent. Once fired with these notions, he will attempt to increase his fortune and enlarge his sphere ; and how few there are that prosecute such attempts with innocence, a very transient observation will sufficiently inform us.

Every man has remarked the indirect methods made use of in the pursuit of wealth ;

VOL I.

K

a pur-

a pursuit for the most part prompted by pride; for to what end is an ample fortune generally coveted? Not that the possessor may have it in his power to relieve distress, or recompense virtue; but that he may distinguish himself from the herd of mankind by expensive vices, foreign luxuries, and a pompous equipage. To pride therefore must be ascribed most of the fraud, injustice, violence, and extortion, by which wealth is frequently acquired.

Another concomitant of pride is envy, or the desire of debasing others. A proud man is uneasy and dissatisfied, while any of those applauses are bestowed on another, which he is desirous of himself. On this account he never fails of exerting all his art to destroy, or obstruct, a rising character. His inferiours he endeavours to depress, lest they should become his equals; and his equals, not only because they are so, but lest they should in time become his superiours. For this end he circulates the whisper of malévolence, aggravates the tale of calumny, and assists the

the clamour of defamation ; opposes in publick the justest designs, and in private depreciates the most uncontested virtues.

Another consequence of immoderate self-esteem is an insatiable desire of propagating in others the favourable opinion he entertains of himself. No proud man is satisfied with being singly his own admirer ; his excellences must receive the honour of the public suffrage. He therefore tortures his invention for means to make himself conspicuous, and to draw the eyes of the world upon him. It is impossible, and would be here improper, to enumerate all the fictitious qualities, all the petty emulations, and laborious trifles, to which this appetite, this eagerness of distinction, has given birth in men of narrow views, and mean attainments. But who can without horror think on those wretches who attempt to raise a character by superiority of guilt ? who endeavour to excel in vice and outvie each other in debauchery ? Yet thus far can pride infatuate the mind, and extinguish the light of reason.

But for the most part it is ordered by Providence, that the schemes of the ambitious are disappointed, the calumnies of the envious detected, and false pretences to reputation ridiculed and exposed, so that still *when pride cometh, then cometh shame ; but with the lowly is wisdom.*

I am now to consider, in the second place, some of the usual motives to pride, and shew how little they can be pleaded in excuse of it.

A superiour Being that should look down upon the disorder, confusion, and corruption of our world, that should observe the shortness of our lives, the weakness of our bodies, the continual accidents, or injuries, to which we are subject ; the violence of our passions, the irregularity of our conduct, and the transitory state of every thing about us, would hardly believe there could be among us such a vice as pride, or that any human Being should need to be cautioned against being too much.

much elated with his present state. Yet so it is, that, however weak or wicked we may be, we fix our eyes on some other that is represented by our self-love to be weaker, or more wicked, than ourselves, and grow proud upon the comparison. Thus in the midst of danger and uncertainty, we see many intoxicated with the pride of prosperity; a prosperity that is hourly exposed to be disturbed, a prosperity that lies often at the mercy of a treacherous friend, or unfaithful servant, a prosperity which certainly cannot last long, but must soon be ended by the hand of death.

To consider this motive to pride more attentively, let us examine what it is to be prosperous. To be prosperous, in the common acceptation, is to have a large, or an increasing, fortune, great numbers of friends and dependants, and to be high in the esteem of the World in general. But do these things constitute the happiness of a man? of a Being accountable to his Creatour for his conduct, and, according to the account he

shall give, designed to exist eternally in a future state of happiness, or misery? What is the prosperity of such a state, but the approbation of that God, on whose sentence futurity depends? But neither wealth, friendships, or honours, are proofs of that approbation, or means necessary to procure it. They often endanger, but seldom promote, the future happiness of those that possess them. And can pride be inspired by such prosperity as this?

Even with regard to the present life, pride is a very dangerous associate to greatness. A proud man is opposed in his rise, hated in his elevation, and insulted in his fall. He may have dependants, but can have no friends; and parasites, but no ingenuous companions.

Another common motive to pride is knowledge, a motive equally weak, vain, and idle, with the former. Learning indeed, imperfect as it is, may contribute to many great and noble ends, and may be called in to the assistance of religion; as it is too often per-
versely

versely employed against it, it is of use to display the greatness, and vindicate the justice, of the Almighty; to explain the difficulties, and enforce the proofs, of Religion. And the small advances that may be made in science are of themselves some proof of a future state, since they shew that God, who can be supposed to make nothing in vain, has given us faculties evidently superiour to the business of this present world. And this is perhaps one reason, why our intellectual powers are in this life of so great extent as they are. But how little reason have we to boast of our knowledge, when we only gaze and wonder at the surfaces of things! when the wisest and most arrogant Philosopher knows not how a grain of corn is generated, or why a stone falls to the ground! But were our knowledge far greater than it is, let us yet remember that goodness, not knowledge, is the happiness of man! The day will come, it will come quickly, when it shall profit us more to have subdued one proud thought, than to have numbered the Host of Heaven.

There is another more dangerous species of pride, arising from a consciousness of virtue; so watchful is the enemy of our souls, and so deceitful are our own hearts, that too often a victory over one sinful inclination exposes us to be conquered by another. Spiritual pride represents a man to himself beloved by his Creatour in a particular degree, and, of consequence, inclines him to think others not so high in his favour as himself. This is an error, into which weak minds are sometimes apt to fall, not so much from the assurance that they have been steady in the practice of justice, righteousness, and mercy, as that they have been punctually observant of some external acts of devotion. This kind of pride is generally accompanied with great uncharitableness, and severe censures of others, and may obstruct the great duty of Repentance. But it may be hoped, that a sufficient remedy against this sin may be easily found, by reminding those who are infected with it, that the Blood of Christ was poured out upon the Cross to make their
best

best endeavours acceptable to God. And that they, whose sins require such an expiation, have little reason to boast of their virtue.

Having thus proved the unreasonableness, folly, and odious nature, of pride, I am, in the last place, to shew the amiableness and excellence of humility.

Upon this head I need not be long, since every argument against any vice is equally an argument in favour of the contrary virtue; and whoever proves the folly of being proud, shews, at the same time, *that with the lowly there is wisdom.* But to evince beyond opposition the excellence of this virtue, we may in few words observe, that the life of our Lord was one continued exercise of humility. The Son of God condescended to take our nature upon him, to become subject to pain, to bear, from his birth, the inconveniencies of poverty, and to wander from city to city, amidst opposition, reproach, and calumny. He disdained not to converse with publicans

publicans and sinners, to minister to his own Disciples, and to weep at the miseries of his own creatures. He submitted to insults and revilings, and, being led like a lamb to the slaughter, opened not his mouth. At length, having borne all the cruel treatment that malice could suggest, or power inflict, he suffered the most lingering and ignominious death.

God of his infinite mercy grant, that, by imitating his humility, we may be made partakers of his merits ! To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour, adoration, and praise, now and ever ! Amen.

S E R M O N VII.

JEREMIAH, Chap. vi. Verse 16.

Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your Souls. But they said, we will not walk therein.

THAT almost every age, from the beginning of the world, has been eminently marked out, and distinguished from the rest, by some peculiar character, by particular

ticular modes of thinking, or methods of acting, then almost universally prevalent, is evident from the histories of all nations. At one time, the whole world has bowed, without repining, to despotic power, and absolute dominion; at another, not only the licentious and oppressive tyranny of governours has been restrained, but just and lawful authority trampled upon, and insulted; at one time, all regard for private interest has been absorbed and lost, in the concern for the welfare of the publick, to which virtue itself has been made a sacrifice; at another, every heart has been engrossed by low views, and every sentiment of the mind has been contracted into the narrow compass of self-love. Thus have vice and virtue, wisdom and folly, or perhaps only different follies and opposite vices, alternately prevailed: thus have mankind rushed from one error to another, and suffered equally by both extremes.

These changes of conduct or opinion may be considered as the revolutions of human nature,

nature, often necessary, but always dangerous; necessary, when some favourite vice has generally infected the world, or some error, long established, begins to tyrannize, to demand implicit faith, and refuse examination; but dangerous, lest the mind, incensed by oppression, heated by contest, and elated by victory, should be too far transported to attend to truth, and, out of zeal to secure her conquest, set up one error, to depress another.

That no change in Religion has been made with that calmness, caution, and moderation, which Religion itself requires, and which common prudence shews to be necessary in the transaction of any important affair, every nation of the earth can sufficiently attest. Rage has been called in to the assistance of zeal, and destruction joined with reformation. Resolved not to stop short, men have generally gone too far, and, in lopping superfluities, have wounded essentials.

This

This conduct, when we consider the weakness of human nature, and the circumstances of most of those by whom such changes have been effected, is entitled at least to compassion, if not to excuse ; nor can it be doubted, that our great Creatour looks down with tenderness and compassion upon the irregular starts and tempestuous agitations of a mind, moved by a zeal for his honour, and a love of truth. Had all error and misconduct such a plea as this, they might indeed be lamented, and prayed against as weaknesses, but could hardly be censured, or condemned, as crimes.

But more slow and silent transitions from one extreme to another are very frequent. Men, not impelled by the vehemence of opposition, but seduced by inclinations less violent, too often deviate from the paths of truth, and persuade others to follow them. The pride of singularity influences the teacher, and a love of novelty corrupts the follower, till the delusion, extending itself by
 3 degrees,

degrees, becomes at length general, and over-
spreads a people.

The prevailing spirit of the present age seems to be the spirit of scepticism and cap-
tiousness, of suspicion and distrust, a contempt
of all authority, and a presumptuous confi-
dence in private judgement; a dislike of all
established forms, merely because they are
established, and of old paths, because they
are old.

Into this temper have men been insensibly
led by a warm assertion of the right of judg-
ing for themselves, a right not to be called
in question, since God himself gave us a claim
to it, in making us reasonable Beings; and
the Apostle doubtless admits it, when he
directs us to give the reason of our faith to
any that shall demand it.

But this privilege, ill understood, has been,
and always may be, the occasion of very
dangerous and pernicious mistakes; it may
be exercised without knowledge or discretion,
till

till error be entangled with error, till divisions be multiplied by endless subdivisions, till the bond of peace be entirely broken, and the Church become a scene of confusion, a chaos of discordant forms of worship, and inconsistent systems of faith.

There are some men, we now find, to whom separation and disagreement appear not such formidable evils, as they are generally represented; who can look, with the utmost calmness and unconcern, at a rising schism, and survey, without any perturbation, the speedy progress of an increasing heresy. Let every man, say they, enjoy his opinions, since *he* only is answerable for them.

There are men, who for the most part value themselves, and are sometimes valued by others, for their enlarged views and generous sentiments; who pretend to look with uncommon penetration into the causes of human actions, and the secret motions of the mind; but perhaps this opinion is no proof
 I that

that their pretensions are well grounded, or that they are better acquainted with human nature, than those whom they affect to ridicule and insult.

If it be granted that it is the duty of every man to publish, profess, and defend any important truth, and the truths of Religion be allowed important; it will follow, that diversity of sentiments must naturally produce controversies and altercations. And how few there are capable of managing debates without unbecoming heat, or dishonest artifices, how soon zeal is kindled into fury, and how soon a concern for reputation mingles with a concern for truth, how readily the antagonists deviate into personal invectives, and, instead of confuting the arguments, defame the lives of those whose doctrine they disapprove, and how often disputes terminate in uproar, riot, and persecution, every one is convinced, and too many have experienced. That diversity of opinions, which is the original and source of such evils as these,

VOL. I.

L.

cannot

cannot therefore be too diligently obviated ; nor can too many endeavours be used to check the growth of new doctrines, and reclaim those that propagate them, before sects are formed, or schisms established.

This is not to be done by denying, or disputing, the right of private judgement; but by exhorting all men to exercise it in a proper manner, according to each man's measure of knowledge, abilities, and opportunities ; and by endeavouring to remove all those difficulties, which may obstruct the discovery of truth, and exposing the unreasonableness of such prejudices as may perplex or mislead the enquirer.

The prejudice, to which many of the disorders of the present age, in which infidelity, superstition, and enthusiasm, seem contending for empire over us, may be justly ascribed, is an over-fondness for novelty, a desire of striking out new paths to peace and happiness, and a neglect of following the precept in the text, of asking
 2 for

for the old paths, where is the good way, and walking therein ; a precept I shall therefore endeavour to illustrate,

First, By laying before you the dangers of judging of Religion, without long and diligent examination.

Secondly, By evincing the reasonableness of searching into antiquity, or of asking for the old paths. And,

Thirdly, By shewing the happiness which attends a well-grounded belief, and steady practice of Religion.

First, I propose to lay before you the dangers of judging of Religion, without a long and diligent examination.

There is no topick more the favourite of the present age, than the innocence of error accompanied with sincerity. This doctrine has been cultivated with the utmost diligence, enforced with all the arts of

argument, and embellished with all the ornaments of eloquence, but perhaps not bounded, with equal care, by proper limitations, nor preserved by just explication, from being a snare to pride, and a stumbling-block to weakness.

That the Judge of all the earth will do right, that he will require in proportion to what he has given, and punish men for the misapplication or neglect of talents, not for the want of them, that he condemns no man for not seeing what he has hid from him, or for not attending to what he could never hear, seems to be the necessary, the inevitable consequence of his own attributes.

That error therefore may be innocent will not be denied, because it undoubtedly may be sincere; but this concession will give very little countenance to the security and supineness, the coldness and indifference, of the present generation, if we consider deliberately how much is required to consti-

tute that sincerity, which shall avert the wrath of God, and reconcile him to error.

Sincerity is not barely a full persuasion of the truth of our assertions, a persuasion too often grounded upon a high opinion of our own sagacity, and confirmed perhaps by frequent triumphs over weak opponents, continually gaining new strength by a neglect of re-examination, which perhaps we decline, by industriously diverting our attention from any objections that arise in our thoughts, and suppressing any suspicion of a fallacy before the mind has time to connect its ideas, to form arguments, and draw conclusions. Sincerity is not a heat of the heart kept up by eager contentions or warm professions, nor a tranquillity produced by confidence, and continued by indolence. There may be zeal without sincerity, and security without innocence. If we forbear to enquire through laziness or pride, or enquire with partiality, passion, or precipitancy; if we do not watch over the most hidden motions of our hearts, and endeavour,

with our utmost efforts, to banish all those secret tendencies, and all those lurking inclinations, which operate very frequently without being attended to, even by ourselves; if we do not carry on our search without regard to the reputation of our teachers, our followers, or ourselves, and labour after truth with equal industry and caution, let us not presume to put any trust in our sincerity.

Such is the present weakness and corruption of human nature, that sincerity, real sincerity, is rarely to be found; but, till it be found, it is the last degree of folly to represent error as innocent. By a God infinitely merciful, and propitiated by the death of our Blessed Saviour, it may indeed be pardoned, but it cannot be justified.

But the greatest part of those that declaim with most vehemence in defence of their darling notions, seem to have very little claim even to pardon on account of
their

their sincerity. It is difficult to conceive what time is allotted to religious questions and controversies by a man whose life is engrossed by the hurries of business, and whose thoughts are continually upon the stretch, to form plans for the improvement of his fortune, or the gratification of his ambition. Nor is it very probable, that such subjects are more seriously considered by men abandoned to pleasure, men who sit down to eat, and rise up to play, whose life is a circle of successive amusements, and whose hours are distinguished only by vicissitudes of pleasure. And yet the questions which these frequently decide, and decide without the least suspicion of their own qualifications, are often of a very intricate and complicated kind, which must be disentangled by a long and continued attention, and resolved with many restrictions and great caution. Not only knowledge, judgement, and experience, but uninterrupted leisure and retirement are necessary, that the chain of reasoning may be preserved unbroken, and

the mind perform its operations without any hindrance from foreign objects.

To this end, men have formerly retreated to solitudes and cloisters, and excluded all the cares and pleasures of the world; and when they have spent a great part of their lives in study and meditation, at last, perhaps, deliver their opinions, as learned men will generally do, with diffidence and fear.

Happy would it be for the present age if men were now thus distrustful of their own abilities. They would not then adopt opinions, merely because they wish them to be true, then defend what they have once adopted, warm themselves into confidence, and then rest satisfied with the pleasing consciousness of their own sincerity. We should not then see men, not eminent for any superior gifts of nature, or extraordinary attainments, endeavouring to form new sects, and to draw the *world after them*. They may indeed

indeed act with an honest intention, and so far with sincerity, but certainly without that caution which their inexperience ought to suggest, and that reverence for their superiours which reason, as well as the laws of society, requires. They seem, even when considered with the utmost candour, to have rather consulted their own imaginations, than to have asked for the old paths, where is the good way. It is therefore proper in this place that I should endeavour,

Secondly, to evince the reasonableness of searching into antiquity, or of asking for the *Old Paths*.

A contempt of the monuments, and the wisdom of antiquity, may justly be reckoned one of the reigning follies of these days, to which pride and idleness have equally contributed. The study of antiquity is laborious; and to despise what we cannot, or will not understand, is a much more expeditious

ditionous way to reputation. Part of the disesteem into which their writings are now fallen may indeed be ascribed to that exorbitant degree of veneration in which they were once held by blindness and superstition. But there is a mean betwixt idolatry and insult, between weak credulity and total disbelief. The Ancients are not infallible, nor are their decisions to be received without examination; but they are at least the determinations of men equally desirous with ourselves of discovering truth, and who had, in some cases, better opportunities than we now have.

With regard to the order and government of the Primitive Church, we may doubtless follow their authority with perfect security; they could not possibly be ignorant of laws executed, and customs practised, by themselves; nor would they, even supposing them corrupt, serve any interests of their own, by handing down false accounts to posterity. We are therefore to enquire from them the
different

different orders established in the ministry from the Apostolick ages, the different employments of each, and their several ranks, subordinations, and degrees of authority. From their writings we are to vindicate the establishment of our church; and by the same writings are those who differ from us, in these particulars, to defend their conduct.

Nor is this the only, though perhaps the chief use of these writers; for, in matters of faith, and points of doctrine, those, at least, who lived in the ages nearest to the times of the Apostles undoubtedly deserve to be consulted. The oral doctrines and occasional explications of the Apostles would not be immediately forgotten, in the churches to which they had preached, and which had attended to them with the diligence and reverence which their mission and character demanded. Their solutions of difficulties, and determinations of doubtful questions, must have been treasured up in the memory of
of

of their audiences, and transmitted, for some time, from father to son. Every thing, at least, that was declared by the inspired teachers to be necessary to salvation, must have been carefully recorded; and therefore what we find no traces of in the Scripture, or the early fathers, as most of the peculiar tenets of the Romish Church, must certainly be concluded to be not necessary. Thus, by consulting first the Holy Scriptures, and next the writers of the Primitive Church, we shall make ourselves acquainted with the will of God; thus shall we discover the good way, and find that rest for our souls which will amply recompence our studies and enquiries, as I shall attempt to prove,

Thirdly, By shewing the happiness which attends a well-grounded belief and steady practice of religion.

The serenity and satisfaction at which we arrive by a firm and settled persuasion of the fundamental articles of our religion, is very
justly

justly represented by the expression of finding rest for the soul. A mind restless and undetermined, continually fluctuating betwixt various opinions, always in pursuit of some better scheme of duties, and more eligible system of faith, eager to embrace every new doctrine, and adopt the notions of every pretender to extraordinary light, can never be sufficiently calm and unruffled, to attend to those duties which procure that peace of God which passeth all understanding.

Suspence and uncertainty distract the soul, disturb its motions, and retard its operations; while we doubt in what manner to worship God, there is great danger lest we should neglect to worship him at all. A man, conscious of having long neglected to worship God, can scarcely place any confidence in his mercy; or hope, in the most pressing exigencies, for his protection. And how miserable is that man, who, on the bed of sickness, or in the hour of death, is without

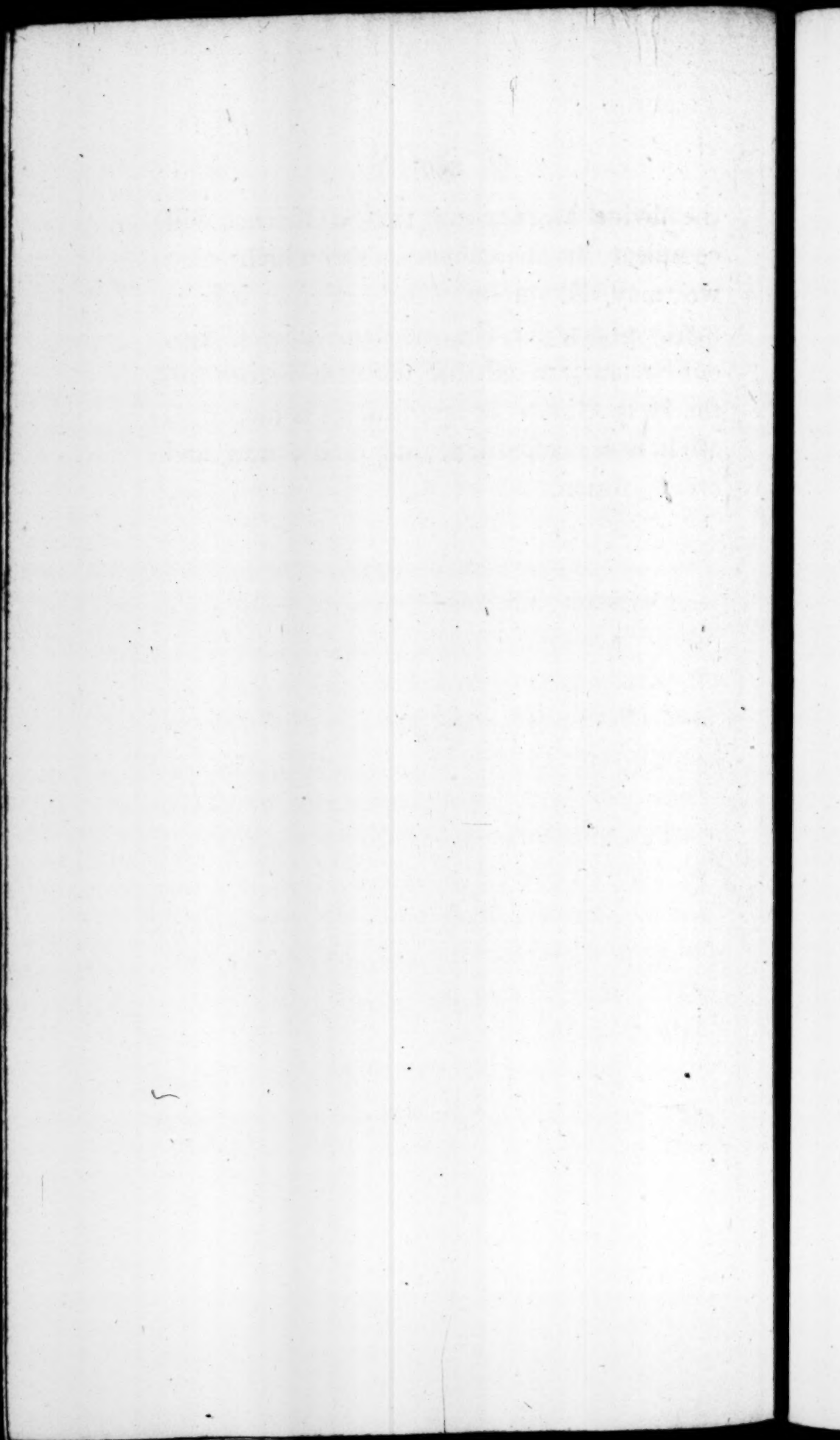
without trust in the goodness of his Creator! This state, dreadful as it appears, may be justly apprehended by those who spend their lives in roving from one new way to another, and are so far from asking for the old paths, where is the good way, that when they are shewn it, they say, we will not walk therein.

There is a much closer connection between practice and speculation than is generally imagined. A man, disquieted with scruples concerning any important article of religion, will, for the most part, find himself indifferent and cold, even to those duties which he practised before with the most active diligence and ardent satisfaction. Let him then ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and he shall find rest for his soul. His mind, once set at ease from perplexity, and perpetual agitation; will return with more vigour to the exercises of piety. An uniform perseverance in these holy practices will produce a steady confidence in
the

the divine favour, and that confidence will compleat his happiness. To which that we may all attain, God of his infinite mercy grant, for the merits of Jesus Christ, our Saviour, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour, adoration, and praise, now and ever ! Amen.



SERMON



S E R M O N VIII.

ROMANS xii, the latter part of the 16th verse.

Be not wise in your own conceits.

IT has been observed by those who have employed themselves in considering the methods of Providence, and the government of the world, that good and evil are distributed, through all states of life, if not in equal proportions, yet in such degrees as leave very little room for those murmurs and complaints which are frequently produced

VOL. I.

M

by

by superficial enquiries, negligent surveys, and impatient comparisons.

Every condition has, with regard to this life, its inconveniences, and every condition has likewise its advantages ; though its position to the eye of the beholder may be so varied, as that at some times the misery may be concealed, and at other times the happiness ; but to judge only by the eye, is not the way to discover truth. We may pass by men, without being able to distinguish whether they are to be numbered among those whose felicities, or whose sorrows, preponderate ; as we may walk over the ground, without knowing, whether its entrails contain mines of gold, or beds of sand.

Nor is it less certain, that, with respect to the more important prospects of a future state, the same impartiality of distribution may be generally remarked ; every condition of humanity, being exposed on one side, and guarded on the other ; so that every man is
burthened,

burthened, though none are overwhelmed; every Man is obliged to vigilance, but none are harrassed beyond their strength. The great business therefore of every man is to look diligently round him, that he may note the approaches of the enemy; and to bar the avenues of temptation, which the particular circumstances of his life are most likely to lay open; and to keep his heart in perpetual alarm against those sins which constantly besiege him. If he be rich, let him beware, lest when he is *full*, *he deny God*, and say, *who is the Lord?* If he be poor, let him cautiously avoid to *steal*, and, *take the name of his God in vain.*

There are some conditions of humanity which are made particularly dangerous by an uncommon degree of seeming security; conditions, in which we appear so compleatly fortified, that we have little to dread, and therefore give ourselves up too readily to negligence and supineness; and are destroyed without precaution, because we flattered ourselves that destruction could not approach

us. This fatal slumber of treacherous tranquillity may be produced and prolonged by many causes, by causes as various as the situations of life. Our condition may be such, as may place us out of the reach of those general admonitions, by which the rest of mankind are reminded of their errors, and awakened to their duty; it may remove us to a great distance from the common incitements to common wickedness, and therefore may superinduce a forgetfulness of our natural frailties, and suppress all suspicions of the encroachments of sin.—And the sin to which we are particularly tempted may be of that insidious and seductive kind, as, that without alarming us by the horrors of its appearance, and shocking us with the enormity of any single acts, may, by slow advances, possess the soul, and in destroying us differ only from the atrociousness of more apparent wickedness, as a lingering poison differs from the sword; more difficultly avoided, and more certainly fatal.

To

To temptations of this subtle, insinuating kind, the life of men of learning seems above all others to be exposed. As they are themselves appointed the teachers of others, they very rarely have the dangers of their own state set before them; as they are, by their abstraction and retirement, secluded from the gaieties, the luxuries, and the pageantries of life, they are willingly persuaded to believe, that because they are at a great distance from the rocks on which conscience is most frequently wrecked, that therefore they sail with safety, and may give themselves to the wind without a compass. The crimes, from which they are in danger, are not those from which the mind has been taught to shrink away with horror, or against which the invectives of Moral or Theological writers have generally been directed; and therefore they are suffered to approach unregarded, to gain ground imperceptibly upon minds directed to different views; and to fix themselves at leisure in the heart, where perhaps

they are scarcely discovered till they are past eradication.

To these causes, or to some of these, it must surely be imputed, that learning is found so frequently to fail in the direction of life; and to operate so faintly and uncertainly in the regulation of *their* conduct, who are most celebrated for their application and proficiency. They have been betrayed, by some false security, to withhold their attention from their own lives; they have grown knowing, without growing virtuous; and have failed of the wisdom which is the gift of the Father of lights, because they have thought it unnecessary to seek it with that anxiety and importunity to which only it is granted; they have trusted to their own powers, and were *wise in their own conceits*.

There is perhaps no class of Men, to whom the precept, given by the Apostle to his converts against too great confidence in their understandings, may be more properly inculcated, than those who are dedicated to the profession

profession of literature, and are therefore necessarily advanced to degrees of knowledge above them who are dispersed among manual occupations, and the vulgar parts of life; whose attention is confined within the narrow limits of their own employments, and who have not often leisure to think of more than the means of relieving their own wants, by supplying the demands of others.

With these, and such as these, placed sometimes, by whatever means, in much higher stations, a man of learning has such frequent opportunities of comparing himself; and is so strongly incited, by that comparison, to indulge the contemplation of his own superiority; that it is not to be considered as wonderful, that vanity creeps in upon him; that he does not willingly withdraw his imagination from objects that so much flatter his passions, that he pursues the train of thought, from one reflection to another, places himself and others, in every situation, in which he can appear with advantage in his own eyes; rises to comparisons with still

higher characters, and still retains the habit of giving himself the preference; and in all disputable cases turns the balance in his own favour, by super-adding, from his own conceit, that wisdom, which by nature he does not possess, or by industry he has not acquired.

This wisdom in his own conceit is very easily at first mistaken for qualities, not in themselves criminal, nor in themselves dangerous; nor is it easy to fix the limits, in speculation, between a resolute adherence to that which appears truth, and an obstinate obtrusion of peculiar notions upon the understanding of others; between the pleasure that naturally arises from the enlargement of the mind, and increase of knowledge, and that which proceeds from a contempt of others, and the insolent triumphs of intellectual superiority. Yet though the confines of these qualities are nearly alike, their extremes are widely different; and it will soon be discovered, how much evil is avoided by repressing that opinion of ourselves, which
vanity

vanity suggests; and that confidence, which is gained only *by measuring ourselves by ourselves*, dwelling on our own excellence, and flattering ourselves with secret panegyrics.

As this false claim to wisdom is the source of many faults, as well as miseries, to men of learning, it seems of the utmost importance to obviate it in the young, who may be imagined to be very little tainted, and suppress it in others, whose greater advances, and more extensive reputation, have more endangered them; nor can any man think himself so innocent of this fault, or so secure from it, as that it should be unnecessary for him to consider,

First, The dangers, which men of learning incur, by being wise in their own conceits.

Secondly, The proper means, by which that pernicious conceit of wisdom may be avoided or suppressed.

In

In order to state with more accuracy the dangers which men, dedicated to learning, may be reasonably imagined to incur, by being wise in their own conceits; it is necessary to distinguish the different periods of their lives; and to examine, whether this disposition is not in its tendency equally opposite to our duty, and, by inevitable consequence in its effects, equally destructive of our happiness in every state.

The business of the life of a scholar is to accumulate, and to diffuse, knowledge; to learn, in order that he may teach. The first part of his time is assigned to study, and the acquisition of learning; the latter, to the practice of those arts which he has acquired, and to the instruction of others who have had less time, or opportunities, or abilities, for improvement. In the state therefore of a learner, or of a teacher, the man of letters is always to be considered; and if it shall appear that, on whatever part of his task he is employed, a false opinion of his own excellence

lence will naturally and certainly defeat his endeavours; it may be hoped, that there will be found sufficient reason, why no man should *be wise in his own conceit.*

Since no Man can teach what he has never learned, the value and usefulness of the latter part of life must depend in a great measure upon the proper application of the earlier years; and he that neglects the improvement of his own mind, will never be enabled to instruct others. Light must strike on the body, by which light can be reflected. The disposition therefore, which best befits a young man, about to engage in a life of study, is patience in enquiry; eagerness of knowledge; and willingness to be instructed; a due submission to greater abilities and longer experience; and a ready obedience to those, from whom he is to expect the removal of his ignorance, and the resolution of his doubts.

How unlikely any one, wise in his own conceit, is to excite, or promote in himself,
such

such inclinations, may be easily determined. It is well known that study is not diligently prosecuted, but at the expence of many pleasures and amusements; which no young man will be persuaded to forbear, but upon the most cogent motives, and the strongest conviction. He that is to draw truth from the depths of obscurity, must be fully informed of its value, and the necessity of finding it; he that engages in a state, opposite to the pleasures of sense, and the gratification of every higher passion, must have some principle within, strongly implanted, which may enforce industry, and repel temptation. But how shall he, who is already *wise in his own conceit*, submit to such tedious and laborious methods of instruction? Why should he toil for that, which, in his own opinion, he possesses; and drudge for the supply of wants, which he does not feel? He has already such degrees of knowledge, as, magnified by his own imagination, exalt him above the rest of mankind; and to climb higher, would be to labour without advantage.

He

He already has a wide extent of science within his view, and his willingness to be pleased with himself does not suffer him to think, or to dwell on the thought of any thing beyond ; and who that sees all, would wish to see farther ? That submission to authority, and that reverence for instruction, which so well becomes every man at his first entrance upon new regions of learning, where all is novelty, confusion, and darkness, and no way is to be found through the intricacies of opposite systems, but by tracing the steps of those that have gone before ; that willingness to receive implicitly what farther advances only can enable him to prove, which initiation always supposes ; are very little to be expected from him, who looks down with scorn upon his teacher, and is more ready to censure the obscurity of precepts, than to suspect the force of his own understanding. Knowledge is to be attained by flow and gradual acquisitions, by a careful review of our ideas, and a regular superstructure of one proposition on another ; and is therefore the

reward only of diligence and patience. But patience is the effect of modesty; pride grasps at the whole, and what it cannot hold, it affects to despise; it is rather solicitous to display, than increase, its acquisitions; and rather endeavours, by fame, to supply the want of knowledge, than by knowledge to arrive at fame.

That these are not imaginary representations, but true copies of real life, most of those, to whom the instruction of young men is intrusted, will be ready to confess; since they have often the dissatisfaction of finding that, in proportion as greater advances have been made in the first period of life, there is less diligence in the second. And that, as it was said of the ancient Gauls, that they were more than men in the onset, and less than women in the shock; it may be said in our literary contentions, that many, who were men at school, are boys at the college.

Their

Their ardour remits, their diligence relaxes; and they give themselves to a lazy contemplation of comparative excellence, without considering that the comparison is hourly growing less advantageous, and that the acquisitions which they boast are mouldering away.

Such is the danger to a learner, of too early an opinion of his own importance; but if we suppose him to have escaped in his first years this fatal confidence, and to be betrayed into it by a longer series of successful application, its effects will then be equally dangerous; and as it hinders a young man from receiving instruction, it will obstruct an older student in conveying it.

There is no employment in which men are more easily betrayed to indecency and impatience, than in that of teaching; in which they necessarily converse with those, who are their inferiours, in the relation by which they are connected, and whom it may be sometimes

times proper to treat with that dignity which too often swells into arrogance ; and to restrain with such authority as not every man has learned to separate from tyranny. In this state of temporary honour, a proud man is too willing to exert his prerogative ; and too ready to forget that he is dictating to those, who may one day dictate to him. He is inclined to wonder that what he comprehends himself is not equally clear to others ; and often reproaches the intellects of his auditors, when he ought to blame the confusion of his own ideas, and the improprieties of his own language. He reiterates therefore his positions without elucidation, and enforces his assertions by his frown, when he finds arguments less easy to be supplied. Thus forgetting that he had to do with men, whose passions are perhaps equally turbulent with his own, he transfers by degrees to his instruction the prejudices which are first raised by his behaviour ; and having forced upon his pupils an hatred of their teacher, he sees it quickly terminate in a contempt of the precept.

But

But instruction extends farther than to seminaries of students, or the narrow auditories of sequestered literature. The end of learning, is to teach the publick, to superintend the conduct, watch over the morals, and regulate the opinions, of parishes, dioceses, and provinces; to check vices in their first eruption, and suppress heresies in the whispers of their rise. And surely this awful, this arduous task, requires qualities, which a man, *wise in his own conceit*, cannot easily attain; that mildness of address, that patience of attention, that calmness of disputation, that selection of times, and places, and circumstances, which the vehemence of pride will not regard. And, in reality, it will generally be found, that the first objection and the last to an unacceptable pastor, is, that he is proud, that he is too wise for familiarity, and will not descend to the level with common understandings.

Such is the consequence of too high an esteem of our own powers and knowledge ; it makes us in youth negligent, and in age useless ; it teaches us too soon to be satisfied with our attainments ; or it makes our attainments unpleasing, unpopular, and ineffectual ; it neither suffers us to learn, nor to teach ; but with-holds us from those by whom we might be instructed, and drives those from us whom we might instruct. It is therefore necessary to obviate these evils, by enquiring,

Secondly, By what means this pernicious conceit of wisdom may be avoided or suppressed.

It might be imagined, if daily experience did not shew us how vainly judgements are formed of real life, from speculative principles, that it might be easy for any man to extirpate a high conceit of human learning from his own heart, or that of another ;
since

since one great purpose of knowledge is to shew us our own defects, follies, and miseries; yet, whatever be the reason, we find none more subject to this fault, than those whose course of life ought more particularly to exempt them from it.

For the suppression of this vain conceit, so injurious to the professors of learning, many considerations might be added to those, which have already been drawn from its effects. The reasons, indeed, why every man should be humble, are inseparably connected with human nature; for what can any man see, either within or without himself, that does not afford him some reason to remark his own ignorance, imbecillity, and meanness? But on these reflections it is less proper to insist, because they have been explained already by almost every writer upon moral and religious duties, and because, in reality, the pride which requires our chief caution is not so much absolute, as comparative. No man so much values himself upon the gene-

ral prerogatives of human nature, as upon his own peculiar superiority to other men; nor will he therefore be humbled, by being told of the ignorance, the weakness, and wickedness of humanity; for he is satisfied with being accounted one of the most knowing, among the ignorant; the most able, among the weak; and the most virtuous, among the wicked.

The pride of the learned therefore can only be repressed by shewing, what indeed might easily be shewn, that it is not justifiable, even upon comparison with the rest of men; for, without urging any thing in derogation from the dignity and importance of learning in general, which must always, either immediately, or by the intervention of others, govern the world, it will be found, that they who are most disposed to be swelled to haughtiness by their own attainments, are generally so far from having any just claim to the superiority which they exert, that they are betrayed to vanity by ignorance;
and

and are pleased with themselves, as a Hind with his cottage, not because, upon enquiry, they are convinced of the reasonableness of the preference; but because they overvalue the little they possess, for want of knowing its littleness; and are contented with their own state, as a blind man feels no loss from the absence of beauty. Nor needs there any other proof of the origin of literary pride, than that it is chiefly to be found amongst those, who have secluded themselves from the world, in pursuit of petty enquiries, and trivial studies.

To such men it should be recommended, that, before they suffer themselves to fix the rule of their own accomplishments, and look down on others with contempt, they should enjoin themselves to spend some time in enquiring into their own pretensions; and consider who they are whom they despise, and for what reason they suffer themselves to indulge the arrogance of contempt. Such an examination will soon drive back the pedant

to his college, with juster conceptions, and with humbler sentiments; for he will find that those, whom he imagined so much below his own exaltation, often flourish in the esteem of the world, while he himself is unknown; and teaching those arts, by which society is supported, and on which the happiness of the world depends; while he is pleasing himself with idle amusements, and wasting his life upon questions, of which very few desire the solution.

But if this method of obtaining humility be ineffectual, he may however establish it, upon more strong and lasting principles, by applying himself to the duties of Religion, and the word of God.

That sacred and inscrutable word, which will shew him the inefficacy of all other knowledge, and those duties which will imprint upon his mind, that he best understands the Sacred Writings who most carefully

fully obeys them. Thus will humility fix a firm and lasting basis, by annihilation of all empty distinctions and petty competitions, by shewing, that *one thing only is necessary*, and that *God is all in all*.



3

S E R M O N IX.

I CORINTHIANS, Chap. II. Verse 28.

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

NOTHING is more frequently injurious to Religion, or more dangerous to Mankind, than the practice of adding to the divine institutions, and of teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. The doctrines of the blessed Sacrament, which, as they are expressed in the
holy

holy Scriptures, do not seem to be very dark or difficult, yet have been so perverted and misrepresented, as to occasion many disputes among men of learning, and many divisions in the Christian world. In our own church, many religious minds have been filled with groundless apprehensions, and distracted with unnecessary inquietudes, by mistaken notions of the Lord's Supper. Many have forborne to partake of it, because they have not, in their own opinion, arrived at that degree of holiness, required to it; which they erroneously conceive to be such, as indeed no mere man ever can attain; a holiness, which consists in little less, than a compleat exemption from sin, and an uniform, and uninterrupted observance of every precept of Religion. They find themselves unable to perform this duty without imperfections, and therefore they entirely neglect it; not considering, that the same reason is of equal force for the neglect of every duty; since none can be performed by us, in this frail state, without lapses, negligences, and failings; and that God will accept unfeigned repentance,

sincere

sincere intentions, and earnest endeavours, though entangled with many frailties. They do not consider, that the participation of the Sacrament is a duty enjoined all Christians, though all do not rise to equal degrees of virtue; and, by consequence, that many must be admitted to the holy table, who have not reached the utmost heights of religious excellence. Heaven itself will be accessible to many, who died in their struggles with sin, in their endeavours after virtue, and the beginning of a new life. And surely, they are not to be excluded from commemorating the sufferings of our Saviour, in a Christian congregation, who would not be shut from Heaven, from the assemblies of Saints, and the choirs of Angels.

There are some who neglect this duty, as they omit others, not from scruples of melancholy piety, or mistaken severity, but from supineness and carelessness, or an opinion, that this precept is less necessary to
be

be observed, than some others delivered by the same authority.

Many other notions, not well-grounded, or capable of proof, are entertained of this institution; which I shall endeavour, without giving a particular account of them, to obviate and suppress, by shewing,

First, What is the nature and end of this institution according to the Scriptures.

Secondly, What are the obligations which enforce the duty of Communion. And,

Thirdly, What things are required of them that come to the Lord's Supper.

First, I propose to lay before you the nature and end of this institution according to the Scriptures.

The account of the first institution of this Sacrament is thus delivered by the Evangelist (Luke, chap. xxii. v. 19.) And he took bread

bread and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave it unto them, saying, *This is my Body which is given for you; This do in remembrance of Me.* Likewise also the Cup after supper, saying, *This Cup is the New Testament in my blood which is shed for you.* This narration is repeated in the Epistle to the Corinthians, with this comment or explanation: *As often as ye eat this Bread, or drink this Cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come.* From these passages compared then it appears, that this sacrament is a representation of the death of our Saviour, appointed by himself, to be celebrated by all his followers, in all ages; to the end that, by commemorating his sufferings in a solemn and publick manner, they might declare their confidence in his merits, their belief of his mission, and their adherence to his Religion.

It has likewise a tendency to increase this confidence, confirm this belief, and establish this adherence, not only by the new strength which every idea acquires by a new impression,

sion, and which every persuasion attains by new recollection, approbation, and meditation, but likewise by the supernatural and extraordinary influences of Grace, and those blessings which God has annexed to the due use of means appointed by himself.

By commemorating the death of Christ, as the Redeemer of the world, we confess our belief in him; for why else should we perform so solemn a rite in commemoration of him? To confess our belief in him, is to declare ourselves his followers. We enter into an obligation to perform those conditions upon which he has admitted us to follow him, and to practise all the duties of that Religion which he has taught us.

This is implied in the word Sacrament, which, being originally used to signify an oath of fidelity taken by the Soldiers to their leaders, is now made use of by the Church, to import a solemn vow, of unshaken adherence to the faith of Christ.

Thus

Thus the Sacrament is a kind of repetition of baptism, the means whereby we are readmitted into the communion of the church of Christ, when we have, by sin, been separated from it; for every sin, and much more any habit or course of sin long continued, is, according to the different degrees of guilt, an apostacy or defection from our Saviour; as it is a breach of those conditions upon which we became his followers; and he that breaks the condition of a covenant, dissolves it on his side. Having therefore broken the covenant between us and our Redeemer, we lose the benefits of his death; nor can we have any hopes of obtaining them, while we remain in this state of separation from him.

But vain had been the sufferings of our Saviour, had there not been left means of reconciliation to him; since every man falls away from him occasionally by sins of negligence at least, and perhaps by known, deliberate, premeditated offences. So that some method of renewing the covenant between

tween God and man was necessary ; and for this purpose this Sacrament was instituted ; which is therefore a renewal of our broken vows, a re-entrance into the society of the church, and the act by which we are restored to the benefits of our Saviour's death, upon performance of the terms prescribed by him.

So that this Sacrament is a solemn ratification of a covenant renewed ; by which, after having alienated ourselves from Christ by sin, we are restored, upon our repentance and reformation, to pardon and favour, and the certain hopes of everlasting life.

When we thus enter upon a new life by a solemn, deliberate, and serious dedication of ourselves to a more exact and vigilant service of God, and oblige ourselves to the duties of piety by this Sacrament, we may hope to obtain, by fervent and humble prayer, such assistances from God as may enable us to perform those engagements, which we have entered into by his command,

mand, and in the manner appointed by him; always remembering, that we must use our own endeavours, and exert our utmost natural powers, for God only co-operates with the diligent and the watchful. We must avoid sin, by avoiding those occasions which betray us to it, and as we pray that we may not be led, we must be cautious of leading ourselves, into temptation.

All sin that is committed by Christians is committed either through an absolute forgetfulness of God, for the time in which the inordinate passion, of whatever kind it be, predominates and prevails; or because, if the ideas of God and Religion were present to our minds, they were not strong enough to overcome and suppress the desires excited by some pleasing, or the apprehensions raised by some terrible, object. So that either the love or fear of temporal good or evil were more powerful than the love or fear of God.

All ideas influence our conduct with more or less force, as they are more or less strongly impressed upon the mind ; and they are impressed more strongly, as they are more frequently recollected or renewed. For every idea, whether of love, fear, grief, or any other passion, loses its force by time ; and, unless revived by accident, or voluntary meditation, will at last vanish. But by dwelling upon, and indulging any idea, we may increase its efficacy and force, make it by degrees predominant in the soul, and raise it to an ascendant over our passions, so that it shall easily over-rule those affections or appetites which formerly tyrannized within us.

Thus, by a neglect of God's worship and sacraments, a man may lose almost all distinction whatsoever of good and evil, and, having no awe of the divine power to oppose his inclinations to wickedness, may go forward from crime to crime without remorse. And he that struggles against vice,
and

and is often overcome by powerful temptations, if, instead of giving way to idleness and despair, he continues his resistance; and, by a diligent attendance upon the service and sacraments of the church, together with a regular practice of private devotion, endeavours to strengthen his faith, and imprint upon himself an habitual attention to the laws of God, and a constant sense of his presence; he will soon find himself able to avoid the snares of sin; or, if he fall into them by inadvertency, to break them. He will find the fear of God grow superior to the desires of wealth, or the love of pleasure; and, by persisting to frequent the church and sacraments, and thereby to preserve those notions of piety from being effaced or weakened, he will be able to persevere in a steady practice of virtue, and enjoy the unspeakable pleasures of a quiet conscience.

Thus it appears, that the blessed sacrament is a commemoration of the death of our

Lord; consequently, a declaration of our faith; and both naturally, and by the co-operation of God, the means of increasing that faith. And it appears also that it is a renewal of our baptismal vow, after we have broken it by sin; and a renovation of that covenant by which we are adopted the followers of Jesus, and made partakers of his merits, and the benefits of his death.

This account has almost anticipated what I professed to treat of,

Secondly, The obligations which enforce the Duty of Communion.

For the obligations to any duty must bear proportion to the importance of it; and the importance of a duty must be rated by the effect which it produces or promotes; and, therefore, as the benefits which we receive from this sacrament have been already shewn, the necessity of it is sufficiently apparent.

But

But we may farther enforce this practice upon ourselves and others, by considering, first, that it is a positive injunction of our blessed Saviour, which, therefore, all those who believe in him are bound to obey. That to dispute the usefulness, or call in question the necessity of it, is to reform his religion, and to set up our own wisdom in opposition to his commands; and that to refuse the means of grace, is to place our confidence in our own strength, and to neglect the assistance of that Comforter, who came down from Heaven according to the most true promise of our blessed Saviour, to lead the Apostles out of darkness and error, and to guide them and us into the clear light and certain knowledge of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ.

If we consider this sacrament as a renewal of the vow of baptism, and the means of reconciling us to God, and restoring us to a participation of the merits of our Saviour, which we had forfeited by sin, we shall need

no persuasions to a frequent communion. For certainly nothing can be more dreadful than to live under the displeasure of God, in constant danger of appearing before him, while he is yet unappeased, and of losing the benefits of our redemption. Whoever he be, whom sin has deluded and led away, let him not delay to return to his duty, lest some sudden disease seize upon him, and the hand of death cut him off for ever from any possibility of reformation, while he is indolent and voluptuous, irreligious and profane. It will be too late to bewail his supineness, and lament his folly, when the dreadful and irrevocable sentence is past, and the gates of hell are closed upon him. “ Seek ye the
 “ Lord while he may be found ; call ye on
 “ him while he is near ! Let the wicked
 “ forsake his way, and the unrighteous man
 “ his thoughts ; and let him return unto
 “ the Lord, and he will have mercy on him,
 “ and to our God, for he will abundantly
 “ pardon.”

But

But lest, instead of obtaining pardon, we aggravate our sins, by coming unprepared to the holy table, let us consider,

Thirdly, What is required of them that come to the Lord's Supper.

With respect to the preparatory duties requisite to a worthy reception of the sacrament, Saint Paul has left this precept: "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread." Which will be easily explained, by recurring to what has been already said of the nature of the sacrament.

By partaking of the communion, we declare, in the most solemn manner, in the presence of God and man, that we hold the faith of Jesus; that we are his followers, who expect eternal salvation from his merits; and, therefore, that we engage ourselves to that obedience to his commands, and that strictness and regularity of life,

which he requires from those who place their confidence in his mediation. We profess, likewise, that we sincerely and humbly repent of those offences by which we have separated ourselves from him ; and that, in consequence of this profession, we unite ourselves again to the communion of the church.

Nothing can be more reasonable before this solemn profession, than that a man examine himself, whether it be true ; whether he really and unfeignedly resolves to accept the conditions of salvation offered to him, and to perform his part of the covenant which he comes to ratify ; or, whether he is not about to mock God ; to profess a faith which he does not hold, and a purity which he does not intend to aim at.

The terms, upon which we are to hope for any benefits from the merits of Christ, are faith, repentance, and subsequent obedience. These are therefore the three chief and general heads of examination. We cannot

not receive the sacrament, unless we believe in Christ, because by receiving it we declare our belief in him, and a lying tongue is an abomination to the Lord. We cannot receive it without repentance, because repentance is the means by which, after sin, we are reconciled to God; and we cannot, without dreadful wickedness, by partaking of the outward tokens of reconciliation, declare that we believe God at peace with our souls, when we know, that by the omission of repentance we are yet in a state of voluntary alienation from him. We cannot receive it, without a sincere intention of obedience; because, by declaring ourselves his followers, we enter into obligations to obey his commandments. We are therefore not transiently and carelessly, but frequently and seriously, to ask ourselves, whether we firmly believe the promises of our Saviour; whether we repent of our sins, and resolve, for the future, to avoid all those things which God has forbidden, and practise all those which he has commanded. And when any man is convinced, that he has formed real resolutions of a new life, let him

him pray for strength and constancy to persevere in them; and then let him come joyfully to the holy table, in sure confidence of pardon, reconciliation, and life everlasting.

Which that we may all obtain, God of his infinite mercy grant, for the merits of Jesus Christ, our Saviour; to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit, three Persons and one God, be ascribed all honour, adoration, and praise, now and for ever! Amen.

SERMON

S E R M O N X.

GALATIANS, Chap. vi. Verse 7.

Be not deceived, God is not mocked ; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap.

ONE of the mighty blessings, bestowed upon us by the Christian Revelation, is, that we have now a certain knowledge of a future state, and of the rewards and punishments that await us after death, and will be adjusted according to our conduct in this

this world. We, on whom the light of the Gospel shines, walk no longer in darkness, doubtful of the benefit of *good*, or the danger of *bad* actions; we know, that we live and act under the eye of our Father and our Judge, by whom nothing is overlooked or forgotten, and who, though to try our obedience he suffers, in the present state of things, the same events to happen to the good and to the evil, will at last certainly distinguish them, by allotting them different conditions beyond the grave; when it will appear, in the sight of men and of angels, how amiable is godliness, and how odious is sin, by the final sentence, which shall bring upon man the consequences of his own actions, so as that *whatsoever a man shall sow, that shall he reap.*

The ancient Heathens, with whose notions we are acquainted, how far soever they might have carried their speculations of moral or civil wisdom, had no conception of a future state, except idle fictions, which
those

those who considered them treated as ridiculous ; or dark conjectures, formed by men of deep thoughts and great enquiry, but neither, in themselves, capable of compelling conviction, nor brought at all to the knowledge of the gross of mankind, of those who lived in pleasure and idleness, or in solitude and labour ; they were confined to the closet of the student, or the school of the lecturer, and were very little diffused among the busy or the vulgar.

There is no reason to wonder, that many enormities should prevail, where there was nothing to oppose them. When we consider the various and perpetual temptations of appetite within, and interest without ; when we see, that on every side there is something that solicits the desires, and which cannot be innocently obtained ; what can we then expect, but that, notwithstanding all the securities of law, and all the vigilance of magistrates, those that know of no other world will eagerly make the most of this, and please themselves whenever they can,
with

with very little regard to the right of others?

As the state of the Heathens was a state of darkness, it must have been a state, likewise, of disorder; a state of perpetual contest for the goods of this life, and by consequence of perpetual danger to those who *abounded*, and of temptation to those that were in *want*.

The Jews enjoyed a very ample communication of the Divine will, and had a religion which an inspired Legislator had prescribed. But even to this nation, the only nation free from idolatry, and acquainted with the perfections of the *true* God, was the doctrine of a future state so obscurely revealed, that it was not *necessarily* consequential to the reception, or observation, of their *practical* religion. The Sadducees, who *acknowledged* the authority of the Mosaical law, yet *denied* the separate existence of the soul, had no expectation of a future state.

state. They held that there was no resurrection, neither Angel nor Spirit.

This was not in those times the *general* state of the Jewish nation; the Pharisees held the resurrection, and with them probably far the greater part of the people; but that any man could be a Jew, and yet deny a future state, is a sufficient proof that it had not yet been *clearly revealed*, and that it was reserved for the Preachers of Christianity to bring life and immortality to light. In such a degree of light they are now placed, that they can be denied or doubted no longer, but as the *Gospel*, that shews them, is doubted or denied. It is now certain that we are *here*, not in our *total*, nor in our *ultimate existence*, but in a state of exercise and probation, commanded to qualify ourselves, by pure hearts and virtuous actions, for the enjoyment of future felicity in the presence of God; and prohibited to break the laws which his wisdom has given us, under the penal sanction of banishment from *heaven* into *regions of misery*.

Yet

Yet notwithstanding the exprefs declaration of our Saviour, and the constant reference of our actions and duties to a future state, throughout the whole volume of the New Testament; there are yet, as in the Apostles time, men who are deceived, who act as if they thought God would be mocked, or deluded, and who appear to forget, that *whatsoever a man sows, that shall he reap.*

From this important caution, given by the Apostle immediately to those whom he was then directing, and consequently to all professors of the religion of Christ, occasion may be taken to consider,

First, How finners *are deceived.*

Secondly, How certain it is, that *God is not mocked.*

Thirdly,

Thirdly, In what sense it is to be understood, that whatsoever a man sows, that shall he reap.

In examining, first, how finners are deceived, it will immediately occur to us, that no man is deceived to his damnation, but by the devil himself. The subtilties of the devil are undoubtedly many; he has probably the power of presenting opportunities of sin, and at the same time of inflaming the passions, of suggesting evil desires, and interrupting holy meditations; but his power is so limited by the Governour of the Universe, that he cannot hurt us without our own consent; his power is but like that of a wicked companion, who may solicit us to crimes or follies, but with whom we feel no necessity of complying; he therefore that yields to temptation, has the greater part in his own destruction; he has been warned of his danger, he has been taught his duty; and, if these warnings and instructions have had no effect, he may be said voluntarily to desert the

right way, and not so much to be deceived by another, as to deceive himself.

Of self-deceit, in the great business of our lives, there are various modes. The far greater part of mankind deceive themselves by willing negligence, by refusing to think on their real state, lest such thoughts should trouble their quiet, or interrupt their pursuits. To live religiously, is to walk, not by sight, but by faith; to act in confidence of things unseen, in hope of future recompence, and in fear of future punishment. To abstract the thoughts from things spiritual is not difficult; things future do not obtrude themselves upon the senses, and therefore easily give way to external objects. He that is willing to forget Religion, may quickly lose it; and that most men are willing to forget it, experience informs us. If we look into the gay, or the busy world, we see every eye directed towards pleasure or advantage, and every hour filled with expectation, or occupied by employment, and day passed after day

day in the enjoyment of success, or the vexation of disappointment.

Nor is it true only of men, who are engaged in enterprises of hazard, which restrain the faculties to the utmost, and keep attention always upon the stretch. Religion is not only neglected by the projector and adventurer, by men, who suspend their happiness on the slender thread of artifice, or stand tottering upon the point of chance. For if we visit the most cool and regular parts of the community, if we turn our eye to the farm, or to the shop, where one year glides uniformly after another, and nothing new or important is either expected or dreaded; yet still the same indifference about eternity will be found. There is no interest so small, nor engagement so slight, but that, if it be followed and expanded, it may be sufficient to keep Religion out of the thoughts. Many men may be observed, not agitated by very violent passions, nor overborne by any powerful habits, nor depraved by any great degrees of wickedness; men who are honest dealers,

faithful friends, and inoffensive neighbours ; who yet have no vital principle of Religion ; who live wholly without self-examination ; and indulge any desire that happens to arise, with very little resistance, or compunction ; who hardly know what it is to combat a temptation, or to repent of a fault ; but go on, neither self-approved, nor self-condemned ; not endeavouring after any excellence, nor reforming any vicious practice, or irregular desire. They have no care of futurity, neither is God in all their thoughts ; they direct none of their actions to his glory, they do nothing with the hope of pleasing, they avoid nothing for the fear of offending him. Those men want not much of being religious, they have nothing more than casual views to reform, and, from being peaceable and temperate Heathens, might, if they would once awaken to their eternal interest, become pious and exemplary Christians. But let them not be deceived, they cannot suppose that God will accept him, who never wished to be accepted by him, or made his will the rule of action.

Others

Others there are, who, without attending to the written revelation of God's will, form to themselves a scheme of conduct, in which vice is mingled with virtue, and who cover from themselves, and hope to cover from God, the indulgence of some criminal desire, or the continuance of some vicious habit, by a few splendid instances of publick spirit, or some few effusions of occasional bounty. But to these men it may, with emphatical propriety, be urged, that God is not mocked; he will not be worshiped nor obeyed, but according to his own laws.

The mode of self-deception which prevails most in the world, and by which the greatest number of souls is at last betrayed to destruction, is the art, which we are all too apt to practise, of putting far from us the evil day, of setting the hour of death, and the day of account, at a great distance.

That death is certain, every one knows; nor is it less known, that life is destroyed at

all ages by a thousand causes; that the strong and the vigorous are liable to diseases, and that caution and temperance afford no security against the final stroke. Yet as the thought of dissolution is dreadful, we do not willingly admit it; the desire of life is connected with animation; every living being shrinks from his destruction; to wish, and to hope, are never far asunder; as we wish for long life, we hope that our wishes will be granted, and what we hope we either believe, or do not examine. So tenaciously does our credulity lay hold of life, that it is rare to find any man so old, as not to expect an addition to his years, or so far wasted and enfeebled with disease, as not to flatter himself with hopes of recovery.

To those, who procrastinate amendment, in hopes of better opportunities in future time, it is too often vainly urged by the preacher, and vainly suggested by a thousand examples, that the hour of death is uncertain. This, which ought to be the cause of their terror, is the ground of their hope;

I

that

that as death is uncertain, it may be distant. This uncertainty is, in effect, the great support of the whole system of life. The man who died yesterday had purchased an estate, to which he intended some time to retire; or built a house, which he was hereafter to inhabit; and planted gardens and groves, that, in a certain number of years, were to supply delicacies to his feasts, and shades to his meditations. He is snatched away, and has left his designs and his labours to others.

As men please themselves with felicities to be enjoyed in the days of leisure and retreat; so among these felicities, it is not uncommon to design a reformation of life, and a course of piety. Among the more enlightened and judicious part of mankind, there are many who live in a continual disapprobation of their own conduct, who know that they do every day what they ought to leave undone, and every day leave undone what they ought to do; and who therefore consider themselves as living under the divine

displeasure, in a state in which it would be very dangerous to die. Such men answer the reproaches of conscience with promises of amendment, promises made with sincerity and intention of performance, but which they consider as debts to be discharged at some remote time. They neither sin with stupid negligence, nor with impious defiance, of the divine laws; they fear the punishments denounced against sin, but pacify their anxiety with possibilities of repentance, and with a plan of life to be led according to the strict precepts of Religion, and to be closed at last by a death softened by holy consolations. Projects of future piety are perhaps not less common than of future pleasure, and are, as there is reason to fear, not less commonly interrupted; with this dreadful difference, that he who misses his intended pleasure, escapes a disappointment, but he who is cut off before the season of repentance, is exposed to the vengeance of an angry God.

Whoever

Whoever has been deluded by this infatuation, and has hitherto neglected those duties which he intends some time to perform, is admonished, by all the principles of prudence, and all the course of nature, to consider how much he ventures, and with how little probability in his favour. The continuance of life, though, like all other things, adjusted by Providence, may be properly considered by us casual; and wisdom always directs us, not to leave that to chance which may be made certain, and not to venture any thing upon chance which it will much hurt us to lose.

He who, accused by his conscience of habitual disobedience, defers his reformation, apparently leaves his soul in the power of chance. We are in full possession of the *present* moment; let the *present* moment be improved; let that, which must necessarily be done some time, be no longer neglected. Let us remember, that if our lot should fall otherwise than we suppose; if we are of the
number

number of them, to whom length of life is not granted; we lose, what can never be recovered, and what will never be recompensed, the mercy of God, and the joys of futurity.

That long life is not commonly granted, is sufficiently apparent; for life is called long, not as being, at its greatest length, of much duration, but as being longer than common. Since therefore the common condition of man is not to live long, we have no reason to conclude, that what happens to few will happen to us.

But, to abate our confidence in our own resolutions, it is to be remembered, that though we should arrive at the great year destined for the change of life, it is by no means certain, that we shall effect what we have purposed. Age is shackled with infirmity and diseases. Immediate pain and present vexation will then do what amusement and gaiety did before, will enchain the attention, and occupy the thoughts, and leave
little

little vacancy for the past or future. Whoever suffers great pain has no other care than to obtain ease ; and, if ease is for a time obtained, he values it too much, to lessen it by painful reflections.

Neither is an efficacious repentance so easy a work, as that we may be sure of performing it at the time appointed by ourselves. The longer habits have been indulged, the more imperious they become ; it is not by bidding them to be gone, that we can at once dismiss them ; they may be suppressed and lie dormant for a time, and resume their force at an unexpected moment, by some sudden temptation ; they can be subdued only by continued caution and repeated conflicts.

The longer sin has been indulged, the more irksome will be the retrospect of life. So much uneasiness will be suffered, at the review of years spent in vicious enjoyment, that there is reason to fear, lest that delay, which began in the love of pleasure, will be continued for fear of pain.

Neither

Neither is it certain, that the grace, without which no man can correct his own corruption, when it has been offered and refused, will be offered again; or that he, who stopped his ears against the first call, will be vouchsafed a second. *He* cannot expect to be received among the servants of God, who will obey him only at his own time; for such presumption is, in some degree, a mockery of God, and we are to consider, secondly, how certain it is, that God is not mocked.

God is not mocked in any sense. He will not be mocked with counterfeit piety, he will not be mocked with idle resolutions; but the sense in which the text declares, that God is not mocked, seems to be, that God will not suffer his decrees to be invalidated; he will not leave his promises unfulfilled, nor his threats unexecuted. And this will easily appear, if we consider, that promises and threats can only become ineffectual by change of mind, or want of power. God
cannot

cannot change his will, *he is not a man that he should repent*; what he has spoken will surely come to pass. Neither can he want power to execute his purposes; he who spoke, and the world was made, can speak again, and it will perish. *God's arm is not shortened, that he cannot save*; neither is it shortened, that he cannot punish; and that he will do to every man according to his works will be shown, when we have considered,

Thirdly, in what sense it is to be understood, that whatsoever a man sows, that shall he reap.

To sow and to reap are figurative terms. To sow, signifies to act; and to reap, is to receive the product of our actions. As no man can sow one sort of grain, and reap another, in the ordinary process of nature; as no man gathers grapes of thorns or figs of thistles, or, when he scatters tares in the furrows, gathers wheat into his garners; so, in the final dispensations of Providence, the same correspondence shall be found in the moral system;

system ; every action shall at last be followed by its due consequences ; we shall be treated according to our obedience or transgressions ; the good shall not miss their reward, nor the wicked escape their punishment ; but, when men shall give account of their own works, they that have done good shall pass into everlasting life, and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.

Let us therefore at this, and at all times, most heartily and fervently beseech Almighty God to give us faithful and sincere repentance, to pardon and forgive us all our sins, to endue us with the grace of his Holy Spirit, and to amend our lives according to his holy will and commandments.

S E R-

S E R M O N XL.

I PETER, Chap. iii. Ver. 8.

*Finally be ye all of one mind, having compassion
one of another, love as brethren, be faithful,
be courteous.*

THE Apostle, directing this Epistle to
the new converts, scattered over the
provinces of Asia, having laid before them
the great advantage of the Religion which
they had embraced, no less than the salva-
tion

tion of their souls, and the high price for which they were redeemed, the precious Blood of Christ, proceeds to explain to them what is required by their *new* profession. He reminds them, that they live among the Heathen, of whom it must necessarily be supposed, that every one watched their conduct with suspicious vigilance; and that it is *their* duty to recommend *right Belief* by *virtuous Practice*; that their *example*, as well as their *arguments*, may propagate the truth.

In this course of instruction, he first mentions the civil relation of governours and subjects; and enjoins them to honour the supreme Magistrate, and to respect all subordinate authority, which is established for the preservation of order, and the administration of justice. He then descends to domestick connections, and recommends to servants obedience and patience, and to husbands and wives their relative and respective duties; to husbands tenderness, and to wives obedience, modesty and gentleness; that the husband, who is not yet converted by the power of
 2 exhortation,

exhortation, may be drawn to the religion of his wife, by perceiving its good effects upon her conversation and behaviour.

He then extends his precepts to greater generality, and lays down a short system of domestick virtue to be universally adopted, directing the new Christians,

First, to be all of one mind.

By the union of minds which the Apostle recommends, it must be supposed that he means not speculative, but practical union; not similitude of opinions, but similitude of virtues. In religious opinions, if there was then any disagreement, they had then living authority, to which they might have recourse: and their business was probably, at that time, more to defend their common faith against the Heathen, than to debate any subtilties of opinion among themselves. But there are innumerable questions, in which vanity or interest engages mankind, which have little connection with their eternal in-

terest; and yet often inflame the passions and produce dislike and malevolence. Sects in philosophy, and factions in the state, easily excite mutual contempt, or mutual hatred. He whose opinions are censured, feels the reputation of his understanding injured; he, whose party is opposed, finds his influence resisted, and perhaps his power, or his profit, in danger of diminution. It could not be the intention of St. Peter, that all men should think alike, either of the operations of nature, or the transactions of the state; but that those who thought differently, should live in peace; that contradiction should not exasperate the disputants, or that the heat should end with the controversy, and that the opposition of party (for such there must sometimes be) should not canker the private thoughts, or raise personal hatred or insidious enmity. He required that they should be all of one *moral* mind, that they should all wish and promote the happiness of each other, that the danger of a Christian should be a common cause, and that no one should wish

wish for advantage by the miscarriage of another.

To suppose that there should, in any community, be no difference of opinion, is to suppose all, of whom that community consists, to be wise alike, which cannot happen; or that the understanding of one part is submitted to that of another, which however would not produce uniformity of opinion, but only of profession; and is, in important questions, contrary to that sincerity and integrity, which truth requires; and an infraction of that liberty, which reason allows. But that men, of different opinions, should live at peace, is the true effect of that humility, which makes each esteem others better than himself, and of that moderation, which reason approves, and charity commands. Be ye therefore all of one mind; let charity be the predominant and universal principle that pervades your lives, and regulates your actions.

Q 2

Secondly,

Secondly, they are directed by the Apostle, to live as men, which have compassion one of another.

The word which is rendered *having compassion*, seems to include a greater latitude of signification than the word compassion commonly obtains. Compassion is not used, but in the sense of tender regard to the unhappiness of another. But the term used by St. Peter may mean mutually feeling for each other, receiving the same impressions from the same things, and this sense seems to be given it by one of the Translators (Castalio). The precept will then be connected and consequential, *Be all of one mind, each feeling, by sympathy, the affections of another.*

Sympathy, the quality recommended in the text, as it has been now explained, is the great source of social happiness. To gain affection, and to preserve concord, it is necessary not only to mourn with those that
mourn,

mourn, but to rejoice with them that rejoice.

To feel sincere and honest joy at the success of another, though it is necessary to true friendship, is perhaps neither very common, nor very easy. There is in every mind, implanted by nature, a desire of superiority, which counteracts the pleasure, which the sight of success and happiness ought always to impart. Between men of equal condition, and therefore willingly consulting with each other, any flow of fortune, which produces inequality, makes him who is left behind, look with less content on his own condition, and with less kindness on him who has reduced him to inferiority. The advancement of a superiour gives pain by increasing that distance, by difference of station, which was thought already greater than could be claimed by any difference; and the rise of an inferior excites jealousy, lest he that went before should be overtaken by his follower. As cruelty looks upon misery without par-

Q₃

taking

taking pain, so envy beholds increase of happiness without partaking joy.

Envy and cruelty, the most hateful passions of the human breast, are both counteracted by this precept, which commanded the Christians of Asia, and now commands us, who succeed them in the profession of the same faith, and the consciousness of the same frailties, to feel one for another. He whose mind is so harmonized to the interest of his neighbour, that good and evil is common to them both, will neither obstruct his rise, nor insult his fall; but will be willing to co-operate with him through all the vicissitudes of life, and dispensations of Providence, to honour him that is exalted, to help him that is depressed. He will controul all those emotions which comparison produces: he will not consider himself as made poorer by another's wealth, or richer by another's poverty; he will look, without malignity, upon superiority, either external or intellectual; he will be willing to learn of those that excel in wisdom, and receive instruction with thank-

thankfulness; he will be willing to impart his knowledge, without fearing lest he should impair his own importance, by the improvement of his hearer.

How much this generous sympathy would conduce to the comfort and stability of life, a little consideration will convince us. Whence are all the arts of slander and depreciation, but from our unwillingness to see others greater, or wiser, or happier, than ourselves? Whence is a great part of the splendour, and all the ostentation of high rank, but to receive pleasure from the contemplation of those who cannot attain dignity and riches, or to give pain to them who look with malignity on those acquisitions which they have desired in vain? Whence is the pain which vanity suffers from neglect, but that it exacted painful homage, and honour which is received with more delight, as it is more unwillingly conferred? The pleasures of comparative excellence, have commonly their source in the pain of others,

and therefore are such pleasures as the Apostle warns the Christians not to indulge.

Thirdly, In pursuance of his injunctions to be of one mind, and to sympathise one with another, he directs them, to love as brethren, or to be lovers of the brethren. (Hammond.) He endeavours to establish a species of fraternity among Christians; that, as they have all one faith, they may have all one interest, and consider themselves as a family that must prosper, or suffer, all together, and share whatever shall befall, either of good or evil. The highest degree of friendship is called brotherly love; and the term by which man is endeared to man, in the language of the Gospel, is the appellation of brother. We are all brethren by our common relation to the universal Father; but that relation is often forgotten amongst the contrariety of opinions, and opposition of passions, which disturb the peace of the world. Ambition has effaced all natural consanguinity, by calling nation to war against nation,

nation, and making the destruction of one half of mankind the glory of the other. Christian piety, as it revived and enforced all the original and primæval duties of humanity, so it restored, in some degree, that brotherhood, or foundation of kindness, which naturally arises from some common relation. We are brothers as we are men, we are again brothers as we are Christians; as men, we are brothers by natural necessity; but as Christians, we are brothers by voluntary choice, and are therefore under an apparent obligation to fulfill the relation; first, as it is established by our Creatour, and, afterwards, as it is chosen by ourselves. To have the same opinions naturally produces kindness, even when these opinions have no consequence; because we rejoice to find our sentiments approved by the judgment of another. But those who concur in Christianity, have, by that agreement in principles, an opportunity of more than speculative kindness; they may help forward the salvation of each other, by counsel or by reproof, by exhortation, by example; they
may

may recall each other from deviations, they may excite each other to good works.

Charity, or universal love, is named by Saint Paul as the greatest and most illustrious of Christian virtues; and our Saviour himself has told us, that by this it shall be known that we are his disciples, if we love one another. Every affection of the soul exerts itself most strongly at the approach of its proper object. Christians particularly love one another, because they can confer and receive spiritual benefits. They are indeed to love all men; and how much the primitive Preachers of the Gospel loved those that differed from them, they sufficiently shewed, when they incurred death by their endeavours to make them Christians. This is the extent of evangelical love, to bring into the light of truth those who are in darkness, and to keep those from falling back into darkness to whom the light has been shewn.

Since

Since life overflows with misery, and the world is filled with evil, natural and moral, with temptation and danger, with calamity and wickedness, there are very frequent opportunities of shewing our unanimity, our sympathy, and our brotherly love, by attempts to remove pressures, and mitigate misfortunes. St. Peter, therefore, particularly presses the duty of commiseration, by calling upon us,

Fourthly, to be pitiful, not to look negligently or scornfully on the miseries of others, but to apply such consolation and assistance as Providence puts into our power.

To attempt an enumeration of all the opportunities which may occur for the exercise of pity, would be to form a catalogue of all the ills to which human nature is exposed, to count over all the possibilities of calamity, and recount the depredations of time, the pains of disease, the blasts of casualty,

casualty, and the mischiefs of malevolence.

Wherever the eye is turned, it sees much misery, and there is much which it sees not; many complaints are heard, and there are many pangs without complaint. The external acts of mercy, to feed the hungry, to cloathe the naked, and to visit the sick, and the prisoners, we see daily opportunities of performing; and it may be hoped, they are not neglected by those that abound with what others want.

But there are other calls upon charity. There are sick minds as well as sick bodies; there are understandings perplexed with scruples, there are consciences tormented with guilt; nor can any greater benefit be conferred, than that of settling doubts, or comforting despair, and restoring a disquieted soul to hope and tranquillity.

The

The duty of commiseration is so strongly pressed by the Gospel, that none deny its obligation. But as the measures of beneficence are left undefined, every man necessarily determines for himself, whether he has contributed his share to the necessities of others; and amidst the general depravity of the world, it can be no wonder if there are found some who tax themselves very lightly, and are satisfied with giving very little.

Some readily find out, that where there is distress there is vice, and easily discover the crime of feeding the lazy, or encouraging the dissolute. To promote vice is certainly unlawful, but we do not always encourage vice when we relieve the vicious. It is sufficient that our brother is in want; by which way he brought his want upon him let us not too curiously enquire. We likewise are sinners. In cases undoubted and notorious, some caution may be properly used, that charity be not perverted; but no man is so
bad

bad as to lose his title to Christian kindness. If a bad man be suffered to perish, how shall he repent?

Not more justifiable is the omission of duty, which proceeds from an expectation of better opportunities, or more pressing exigencies. Of such excuses, or of such purposes, there can be no end. Delay not till to-morrow, what thou mayest do to-day! A good work is now in thy power, be quick and perform it! By *thy* refusal, *others* may be discouraged from asking; or so near may be the end of thy life, that thou mayest never do what is in thy heart. Every call to charity is a gift of God, to be received with thankfulness, and improved with diligence.

There are likewise many offices of kindness which cannot properly be classed under the duty of commiseration, as they do not presuppose either misery or necessity, and yet are of great use for conciliating affection,

and smoothing the paths of life ; and, as it is of great importance, that goodness should have the power of gaining the affections, the Apostle has not neglected those subordinate duties, for he commands Christians,

Fifthly, to be courteous.

For courteous, some substitute the word humble ; the difference may not be considered as great, for pride is a quality that obstructs courtesy.

That a precept of courtesy is by no means unworthy of the gravity and dignity of an apostolical mandate, may be gathered from the pernicious effects which all must have observed to have arisen from harsh strictness and sour virtue, such as refuses to mingle in harmless gaiety, or give countenance to innocent amusements, or which transacts the petty business of the day with a gloomy ferociousness that clouds existence. Good-
ness

ness of this character is more formidable than lovely; it may drive away vice from its presence, but will never persuade it to stay to be amended; it may teach, it may remonstrate, but the hearer will seek for more mild instruction. To those, therefore, by whose conversation the Heathens were to be drawn away from error and wickedness; it is the Apostle's precept, that they be courteous, that they accommodate themselves, as far as innocence allows, to the will of others; that they should practise all the established modes of civility, seize all occasions of cultivating kindness, and live with the rest of the world in an amicable reciprocation of cursory civility, that Christianity might not be accused of making men less cheerful as companions, less sociable as neighbours, or less useful as friends.

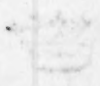
Such is the system of domestick virtue, which the Apostle recommends. His words are few, but their meaning is sufficient to fill the greater part of the circle of life. Let

us

us remember to be all of one mind, so as to grieve, and rejoice together ; to confirm, by constant benevolence, that brotherhood which creation and redemption have constituted ! Let us commiserate and relieve affliction, and endear ourselves by general gentleness and affability ; it will from hence soon appear how much goodness is to be loved, and how much human-nature is meliorated by religion.



us remember to be all of one mind, to be to
give, and rejoice together; to continue by
constant labours, that brotherhood which
creation and redemption have constituted!
Let us communicate and give assistance, and
cheer ourselves by mutual comforts and af-
fection: it will then be seen how
much goodness is to be loved, and how
much human nature is benefited by re-



joyments, disposed as to doubt; however
forcibly it may be urged upon us by reason
or experience.

Every man will readily enough confess
that his own condition discontent him; and
that he has not yet been able, with all his

S E R M O N XII.
capacities, to find it. But he still thinks it
is somewhere to be found, or by some means
to be procured. His every thought dis-

tingles him to imagine, that others possess it;
and his ambition points the way by which
he supposes that he shall reach at last, the

ECCLESIASTES, Chap. i. Verse 14.

*I have seen all the works that are done under
the Sun; and behold, all is vanity and vexa-
tion of Spirit.*

THAT all human actions terminate in
vanity, and all human hopes will end
in vexation, is a position, from which na-
ture with-holds our credulity, and which our
fondness for the present life, and worldly en-
joyments,

joyments, disposes us to doubt; however forcibly it may be urged upon us by reason or experience.

Every man will readily enough confess, that his own condition discontents him; and that he has not yet been able, with all his labour, to make happiness, or, with all his enquiries, to find it. But he still thinks it is somewhere to be found, or by some means to be procured. His envy sometimes persuades him to imagine, that others possess it; and his ambition points the way by which he supposes that he shall reach, at last, the station to which it is annexed. Every one wants something to happiness; and when he has gained what he first wanted, he wants something else; he wears out life in efforts and pursuits, and perhaps dies, regretting that he must leave the world, when he is about to enjoy it.

So great is our interest, or so great we think it, to believe ourselves able to procure our own happiness, that experience never convinces

convinces us of our impotence ; and indeed our miscarriages might be reasonably enough imputed by us to our own unskilfulness, or ignorance, if we were able to derive intelligence from no experience but our own. But surely we may be content to credit the general voice of mankind, complaining incessantly of general infelicity ; and when we see the restlessness of the young, and the peevishness of the old ; when we find the daring and the active combating misery, and the calm and humble lamenting it ; when the vigorous are exhausting themselves in struggles with their own condition, and the old and the wise retiring from the contest in weariness and despondency ; we may be content at last to conclude, that if happiness had been to be found, some would have found it, and that it is vain to search longer for what all have missed.

But though our obstinacy should hold out, against common experience and common authority, it might at least give way to the declaration of Solomon, who has left this

testimony to succeeding ages; that all human pursuits and labours are vanity. From the like conclusion made by other men, we may escape; by considering, that *their* experience was small, and *their* power narrow; that they pronounced with confidence upon that, which they could not know; and that many pleasures might be above their reach, and many more beyond their observation; *they* may be considered, as uttering the dictates of discontent, rather than persuasion; and as speaking not so much of the general state of things, as of their own share, and their own situation.

But the character of Solomon leaves no room for subterfuge; he did not judge of what he did not know. He had in his possession whatever power and riches, and, what is still more, whatever wisdom and knowledge, could confer. As he understood the vegetable creation, from the Cedar of Libanus, to the Hyssop on the wall; so there is no doubt, but he had taken a survey of all the gradations of human life, from the
throne

throne of the prince, to the shepherd's cottage. He had in his hand all the instruments of happiness, and in his mind the skill to apply them. Every power of delight which others possessed, he had authority to summon, or wealth to purchase; all that royal prosperity could supply, was accumulated upon him; at home he had peace, and in foreign countries he had honour; what every nation could supply, was poured down before him. If power be grateful, he was a King; if there be pleasure in knowledge, he was the wisest of mankind; if wealth can purchase happiness, he had so much gold, that silver was little regarded. Over all these advantages, presided a mind, in the highest degree disposed to magnificence and voluptuousness, so eager in pursuit of gratification, that alas! after every other price had been bid for happiness, Religion and virtue were brought to the sale. But after the anxiety of his enquiries, the weariness of his labours, and the loss of his innocence, he obtained only this conclusion: *I have seen*

all the works that are done under the Sun ; and behold, all is vanity and vexation of Spirit.

That this result of Solomon's experience, thus solemnly bequeathed by him to all generations, may not be transmitted to us without its proper use ; let us diligently consider,

First, In what sense we are to understand, that all is vanity.

Secondly, How far the conviction, that all is vanity, ought to influence the conduct of life.

Thirdly, What consequences the serious and religious mind may deduce from the position, that all is vanity.

When we examine, first, in what sense we are to understand, that all is vanity ; we must remember, that the Preacher is not speaking of religious practices, or of any actions immediately commanded by God, or directly

rectly referred to him ; but of such employments as we pursue by choice, and such works as we perform, in hopes of a recompense in the present life ; such as flatter the imagination with pleasing scenes, and probable increase of temporal felicity ; of this he determines that all is vanity, and every hour confirms his determination,

The event of all human endeavours is uncertain. He that plants, may gather no fruit ; he that sows, may reap no harvest. Even the most simple operations are liable to miscarriage, from causes which we cannot foresee ; and, if we could foresee them, cannot prevent. What can be more vain, than the confidence of man, when the annual provision made for the support of life is not only exposed to the uncertainty of the weather, and the variation of the sky, but lies at the mercy of the reptiles of the earth, or the insects of the air ? The rain and the wind he cannot command ; the caterpillar he cannot destroy ; and the locust he cannot drive away.

But

But these effects, which require only the concurrence of natural causes, though they depend little upon human power, are yet made by Providence regular and certain, in comparison with those extensive and complicated undertakings which must be brought to pass by the agency of man, and which require the union of many understandings, and the co-operation of many hands. The history of mankind is little else than a narrative of designs which have failed, and hopes that have been disappointed. In all matters of emulation and contest, the success of one implies the defeat of another, and at least half the transaction terminates in misery. And in designs not directly contrary to the interest of another, and therefore not opposed either by artifice or violence, it frequently happens, that by negligence or mistake, or unseasonable officiousness, a very hopeful project is brought to nothing.

To find examples of disappointment and uncertainty, we need not raise our thoughts
to

to the interests of nations, nor follow the warrior to the field, or the statesman to the council. The little transactions of private families are entangled with perplexities; and the hourly occurrences of common life are filling the world with discontent and complaint. Every man hopes for kindness from his friends, diligence from his servants, and obedience from his children; yet friends are often unfaithful, servants negligent, and children rebellious. Human wisdom has, indeed, exhausted its power, in giving rules for the conduct of life; but those rules are themselves but vanities. They are difficult to be observed, and, though observed, are uncertain in the effect.

The labours of man are not only uncertain, but imperfect. If we perform what we designed, we yet do not obtain what we expected. What appeared great when we desired it, seems little when it is attained; the wish is still unsatisfied, and something always remains behind, without which, the gratification is incomplete. He that rises to greatness,

ness, finds himself in danger ; he that obtains riches, perceives that he cannot gain esteem. He that is careffed, sees interest lurking under kindness ; and he that hears his own praises, suspects that he is flattered. Discontent and doubt are always pursuing us. Our endeavours end without performance, and performance ends without satisfaction,

But, since this uncertainty and imperfection is the lot which our Creatour has appointed for us, we are to enquire,

Secondly, How far the conviction, that all is vanity, ought to influence the conduct of life,

Human actions may be distinguished into various classes. Some are actions of duty, which can never be vain, because God will reward them. Yet these actions, considered as terminating in this world, will often produce vexation. It is our duty to admonish the vicious, to instruct the ignorant, and relieve the poor ; and our admonitions will, sometimes,

times, produce anger, instead of amendment; our instructions will be sometimes bestowed upon the perverse, the stupid, and the inattentive; and our charity will be sometimes misapplied by those that receive it, and, instead of feeding the hungry, will pamper the intemperate; but these disappointments do not make good actions vain, though they show us how much all success depends upon causes, on which we have no influence.

There are likewise actions of necessity; these are often vain and vexatious; but such is the order of the world, that they cannot be omitted. He that will eat bread, must plow and sow; though it is not certain, that he who plows and sows shall eat bread. It is appointed, that life should be sustained by labour; and we must not sink down in sullen idleness, when our industry is permitted to miscarry. We shall often have occasion to remember the sentence, denounced by the Preacher, upon all that is done under the sun; but we must still prosecute our business, confess our imbecillity, and turn our
eyes

eyes upon Him, whose mercy is over all his works, and who, though he humbles our pride, will succour our necessities.

Works of absolute necessity are few and simple ; a very great part of human diligence is laid out in accommodations of ease, or refinements of pleasure ; and the further we pass beyond the boundaries of necessity, the more we lose ourselves in the regions of vanity, and the more we expose ourselves to vexation of spirit. As we extend our pleasures, we multiply our wants. The pain of hunger is easily appeased ; but to surmount the disgust of appetite, vitiated by indulgence, all the arts of luxury are required, and all are often vain. When to the enjoyments of sense are superadded the delights of fancy, we form a scheme of happiness that never can be complete, for we can always imagine more than we possess. All social pleasures put us more or less in the power of others, who sometimes cannot, and sometimes will not, please us. Conversations of argument often end in bitterness of controversy ; and
conversations

conversations of mirth, in petulance and folly. Friendship is violated by interest, or broken by passion ; and benevolence finds its kindness bestowed on the worthless and ungrateful.

But most certain is the disappointment of him, who places his happiness in comparative good, and considers, not what he himself wants, but what others have. The delight of eminence must, by its own nature, be rare, because he that is eminent must have many below him, and therefore, if we suppose such desires general, as very general they are, *the happiness of a few must arise from the misery of many.* He that places his delight in the extent of his renown is, in some degree, at the mercy of every tongue ; not only malevolence, but indifference, may disturb him ; and he may be pained, not only by those who speak ill, but by those likewise that say nothing.

As every engine of artificial motion, as it consists of more parts, is in more danger of
deficiency

deficiency and disorder ; so every effect, as it requires the agency of greater numbers, is more likely to fail. Yet what pleasure is granted to man, beyond the gross gratifications of sense, common to him with other animals, that does not demand the help of others, and the help of greater numbers, as the pleasure is sublimated and enlarged? And, since such is the constitution of things, that whatever can give pleasure can likewise cause uneasiness, there is little hope that uneasiness will be long escaped. Of them, whose offices are necessary to felicity, some will be perverse, and some will be unskilful ; some will negligently withhold their contributions, and some will enviously withdraw them. The various and opposite directions of the human mind, which divide men into so many different occupations, keep all the inhabitants of the earth perpetually busy ; but when it is considered, that the business of every man is to counteract the purpose of some other man, it will appear, that universal activity cannot contribute much to universal happiness. Of those that contend,

one

one must necessarily be overcome ; and he that prevails never has his labour rewarded to his wish, but finds that he has been contending for that which cannot satisfy, and engaged in a contest where even victory is vanity.

What then is the influence which the conviction of this unwelcome truth ought to have upon our conduct ? It ought to teach us humility, patience, and diffidence. When we consider how little we know of the distant consequences of our own actions, how little the greatest personal qualities can protect us from misfortune, how much all our importance depends upon the favour of others, how uncertainly that favour is bestowed, and how easily it is lost ; we shall find, that we have very little reason to be proud. That which is most apt to elate the thoughts, height of place, and greatness of power, is the gift of others. No man can, by any natural or intrinsic faculties, maintain himself in a state of superiority ; he is exalted to his place, whatever it be, by the concurrence of those,

who are for a time content to be counted his inferiors; he has no authority in himself; he is only able to controul some, by the help of others. If dependence be a state of humiliation, every man has reason to be humble, for every man is dependent.

But however unpleasing these considerations may be, however unequal our condition is to all our wishes or conceptions, we are not to admit impatience into our bosoms, or increase the evils of life, by vain throbs of discontent. To live in a world where all is vanity, has been decreed by our Creatour to be the lot of man, a lot which we cannot alter by murmuring, but may soften by submission.

The consideration of the vanity of all human purposes and projects, deeply impressed upon the mind, necessarily produces that diffidence in all worldly good, which is necessary to the regulation of our passions, and the security of our innocence. In a smooth
course

course of prosperity, an unobstructed progression from wish to wish, while the success of one design facilitates another, and the opening prospect of life shews pleasures at a distance, to conclude that the passage will be always clear, and that the delights which solicit from far will, when they are attained, fill the soul with enjoyments, must necessarily produce violent desires, and eager pursuits, contempt of those that are behind, and malignity to those that are before. But the full persuasion that all earthly good is uncertain in the attainment, and unstable in the possession, and the frequent recollection of the slender supports on which we rest, and the dangers which are always hanging over us, will dictate inoffensive modesty, and mild benevolence. *He* does not rashly treat another with contempt, who doubts the duration of his own superiority: *he* will not refuse assistance to the distressed, who supposes that he may quickly need it himself. He that considers how imperfectly human wisdom can judge of that, which has not been tried, will

feldom think any possibilities of advantage worthy of vehement desire. As his hopes are moderate, his endeavours will be calm. He will not fix his fond hopes upon things which he knows to be vanity, but will enjoy this world, as one who knows that he does not possess it: and that this is the disposition, which becomes our condition, will appear, when we consider,

Thirdly, What consequences the serious and religious mind may draw from the position, that all is vanity.

When the present state of man is considered, when an estimate is made of his hopes, his pleasures, and his possessions; when his hopes appear to be deceitful, his labours ineffectual, his pleasures unsatisfactory, and his possessions fugitive, it is natural to wish for an abiding city, for a state more constant and permanent, of which the objects may be more proportioned to our wishes, and the enjoyments to our capacities; and from this wish
it

it is reasonable to infer, that such a state is designed for us by that Infinite Wisdom, which, as it does nothing in vain, has not created minds with comprehensions never to be filled. When Revelation is consulted, it appears that such a state is really promised, and that, by the contempt of worldly pleasures, it is to be obtained. We then find, that, instead of lamenting the imperfection of earthly things, we have reason to pour out thanks to Him who orders all for our good, that he has made the world, such as often deceives, and often afflicts us; that the charms of interest are not such, as our frailty is unable to resist, but that we have such interruptions of our pursuits, and such languour in our enjoyments, such pains of body and anxieties of mind, as repress desire, and weaken temptation: and happy will it be, if we follow the gracious directions of Providence, and determine, that no degree of earthly felicity shall be purchased with a crime; if we resolve no longer to bear the chains of sin, to employ all our endeavours

upon transitory and imperfect pleasures, or to divide our thoughts between the world and Heaven; but to bid farewell to sublunary vanities, to endure no longer an unprofitable vexation of spirit, but with pure heart and steady faith to *fear God, and to keep his commandments, and remember that this is the whole of man.*



SERMON

S E R M O N XIII.

II. Timothy, Chap. iii. part of the 5th Verse.

Having a form of Godliness, but denying the power thereof.

WHEN St. Paul, in the precepts given to Timothy for his instruction how to regulate and purify the conversation of the first Christians, directed him to take care that those men should be avoided, as dangerous and pestilent, who, having the

form of godliness, denied the power; it is reasonable to believe, that he meant, in his direct and immediate intention, to awaken his caution against gross hypocrites; such as may easily be supposed to have appeared too often in the most early seminaries of Christianity; who made an appearance of righteousness subservient to worldly interest; and whose conversion, real or pretended, gave them an opportunity of preying upon artless simplicity, by claiming that kindness which the first Believers shewed to one another; and obtaining benefactions which they did not want; and eating bread for which they did not labour.

To Impostors of this kind, the peculiar state of the first Christians would naturally expose them. As they were surrounded by enemies, they were glad to find, in any man, the appearance of a friend; as they were wearied with importunate contradiction, they were desirous of an interval of respite, by consorting with any one that professed the same opinions; and what was still more favourable

vourable to such Impostors, when they had, by embracing an unpopular and persecuted religion, divested themselves, in a great degree, of secular interest, they were likely often to want that vigilance and suspicion which is forced, even upon honest minds, by much commerce with the world, and frequent transactions with various characters; and which our divine Master teaches us to practise, when he commands us to join the *Wisdom of the Serpent with the harmlessness of the Dove*. The first Christians must have been, in the highest degree, zealous to strengthen their faith in themselves, and propagate it in others; and zeal easily spreads the arms, and opens the bosom to an adherent, or a profelyte, as to one, that adds another suffrage to truth, and strengthens the support of a good cause. Men of this disposition, and in this state of life, would easily be enamoured of the *form* of godliness, and not soon discover, that the *power* was wanting.—Men naturally think others like themselves, and therefore a good man is easily per-

persuaded to credit the appearance of Virtue.

Hypocrisy, however, was not confined to the Apostolick ages. All times, and all places, have produced men, that have endeavoured to gain credit by false pretensions to excellence, and have recommended themselves to kindness or esteem, by specious professions, and ostentatious displays of counterfeited virtues.—It is, however, less necessary now to obviate this kind of fraud, by exhortations to caution; for that simplicity, which lay open to its operation, is not now very frequently to be found. The Hypocrite, in these times, seldom boasts of much success.—He is for the most part soon discovered; and when he is once known, the world will not wait for counsel to avoid him, for the good detest, and the bad despise him. He is hated for his attempts, and scorned for his miscarriage.

It may therefore be proper to consider the danger of a *form of righteousness* without the
 5 *power,*

power, in a different and secondary sense; and to examine whether, as there are some who by this form deceive others, there are not some, likewise, that deceive themselves; who pacify their consciences with an appearance of piety, and live and die in dangerous tranquillity and delusive confidence.

In this enquiry it will be proper to consider, First, what may be understood by the *form* of godliness, as distinct from the *power*.

Secondly, What is that power of godliness, without which the form is defective and unavailing.

Thirdly, How far it is necessary to the Christian life, that the form and power should subsist together.

Let it therefore be first considered, what may be easily and naturally understood by
the

the form of godliness as distinct from the power.

By the form of godliness, may be properly understood, not only a specious practice of religious duties, exhibited to publick notice, but all external acts of worship, all rites and ceremonies, all stated observances, and all compliance with temporary and local injunctions and regularities.

The religion of the Jews, from the time of Moses, comprized a great number of burdensome ceremonies, required by God for reasons which perhaps human wisdom has never fully discovered. Of these ceremonies, however, some were typically representative of the Christian institution; and some, by keeping them distinct, by dissimilitude of customs from the nations that surrounded them, had a tendency to secure them from the influence of ill example, and preserve them from the contagion of idolatry.

To

To the use of observances, thus important, they were confined by the strongest obligations. They were indeed external acts, but they were instituted by divine authority; they were not to be considered merely as instrumental and expedient, as means which might be omitted, if their ends were secured: they were positively enjoined by the supreme legislator, and were not left to choice or discretion, or secular laws; to the will of the powerful, or the judgement of the prudent.

Yet even these sacred rites might be punctually performed, without making the performer acceptable to God; the blood of bulls and of goats might be poured out in vain, if the desires were not regulated, or the passions subdued. The sacrifices of the oppressor, or extortioner, were not an atonement, but an abomination. Forgiveness was obtained, not by incense, but by repentance; the offender was required to rend his heart, and not his garment; a contrite and a broken heart

heart was the oblation which the supreme Judge did not despise.

So much was the moral law exalted above all ceremonial institutions, even in that dispensation by which so many ceremonies were commanded, that those two parts of duty were distinguished by the appellations of body and spirit. As the body, separated from the spirit, is a mass lifeless, motionless, and useless; so the external practice of ritual observances was ineffectual and vain, an action without a meaning, a labour by which nothing was produced. As the spirit puts the limbs into motion, and directs their action to an end, so Justice and Mercy gave energy to ceremonies, made the oblation grateful, and the worshiper accepted.

The Professors of Christianity have few ceremonies indispensably enjoined them. Their religion teaches them to worship God, not with local or temporary ceremonies, but in spirit and in truth; that is, with internal
purity,

purity, and moral righteousness. For spirit, in this sense, seems to be opposed to the body of external rites; and truth is known to signify, in the biblical language, the sum of those duties which we owe to one another.

Yet such are the temptations of interest and pleasure, and so prevalent is the desire of enjoying at once, the pleasures of sin for a season, and the hopes of happiness to eternity; that even the Christian religion has been depraved by artificial modes of piety, and succedaneous practices of reconciliation. Men have been ever persuaded, that by doing something, to which they think themselves not obliged, they may purchase an exemption from such duties as they find themselves inclined to violate; that they may commute with heaven for a temporal fine, and make rigour atone for laxity.

In

In ages and countries, in which ignorance has produced, and nourished, superstition; many artifices have been invented, of practising piety without virtue, and repentance without amendment. The devotion of our blind fore-fathers consisted, for a great part, in rigorous austerities, laborious pilgrimages, and gloomy retirement; and that which now prevails, in the darker provinces of the Popish world, exhausts its power in absurd veneration for some particular Saint, expressed too often by honours paid to his image, or in a stated number of prayers, uttered with very little attention, and very frequently with little understanding.

Some of these practices may be perhaps justly imputed to the grossness of a people, scarcely capable of worship purely intellectual; to the necessity of complying with the weakness of men, who must be taught their duty by material images, and sensible impressions. This plea, however, will avail but little, in defence of abuses not only permitted,

but encouraged by pertinacious vindications, and fictitious miracles.

It is apparent that the Romish Clergy have attributed too much efficacy to pious donations, and charitable establishments; and that they have made liberality to the church, and bounty to the poor, equivalent to the whole system of our duty to God, and to our neighbour.

Yet nothing can be more repugnant to the general tenour of the Evangelical Revelation, than an opinion that pardon may be bought, and guilt effaced, by a stipulated expiation. We naturally catch the pleasures of the present hour, and gratify the calls of the reigning passion: and what shall hinder the man of violence from outrage and mischief, or restrain the pursuer of interest from fraud and circumvention, when they are told, that after a life passed in disturbing the peace of life, and violating the security of possession, they may die at last in peace,

by founding an alms-house, without the agonies of deep contrition ?

But error and corruption are often to be found where there are neither Jews nor Papists.—Let us not look upon the depravity of others with triumph, nor censure it with bitterness.—Every sect may find, in its own followers, those who have the form of godliness, without the power ; every man, if he examines his own conduct, without intention to be his own flatterer, may, to a certain degree, find it in himself.

To give the heart to God, and to give the whole heart, is very difficult ; the last, the great effort of long labour, fervent prayer, and diligent meditation.—Many resolutions are made, and many relapses lamented ; and many conflicts with our own desires, with the powers of this world, and the powers of darkness, must be sustained, before the will of man is made wholly obedient to the will of God.

In

In the mean time, we are willing to find some way to Heaven, less difficult and less obstructed, to keep our hopes alive by faint endeavours, and to lull our consciences by such expedients as we may easily practise. Not yet resolved to live wholly to God, and yet afraid to live wholly to the world, we do something in recompence for that which we neglect, and resign something that we may keep the rest.

To be strictly religious, is difficult; but we may be zealously religious, at little expence.—By expressing on all occasions our detestation of Heresy and Popery, and all other errors, we erect ourselves into champions for truth, without much hazard or trouble.—The hopes of zeal are not wholly groundless.—Indifference in questions of importance is no amiable quality.—He that is warm for truth, and fearless in its defence, performs one of the duties of a good man; he strengthens his own conviction, and

guards others from delusion ; but steadiness of belief, and boldness of profession, are yet only part of the form of godliness, which may be attained by those who deny the power.

As almost every man is, by nature or by accident, exposed to danger from particular temptations, and disposed to some vices more than to others ; so all are, either by disposition of mind, or the circumstances of life, inclined or impelled to some laudable practices. Of this happy tendency it is common to take advantage, by pushing the favourite, or the convenient, virtue to its utmost extent, and to lose all sense of deficiency in the perpetual contemplation of some single excellence.

Thus some please themselves with a constant regularity of life, and decency of behaviour,—they hear themselves commended, and superadd their own approbation. They know, or might know, that they have secret faults ;

faults; but, as they are not open to accusation, they are not inquisitive to their own disquiet; they are satisfied that they do not corrupt others, and that the world will not be worse by their example.

Some are punctual in the attendance on publick worship, and perhaps in the performance of private devotion. These they know to be great duties, and resolve not to neglect them. It is right they go so far; and with so much that is right they are satisfied. They are diligent in adoration, but defective in obedience.

Such men are often not hypocrites; the virtues which they practise arise from their principles. The man of regularity really hopes, that he shall recommend goodness to those that know him. The frequenter of the church really hopes to propitiate his Creatour. Their religion is sincere; what is reprehensible is, that it is partial, that the heart is yet not purified, and that yet many

inordinate desires remain, not only unsubdued, but unsuspected, under the splendid cover of some specious practice, with which the mind delights itself too much, to take a rigorous survey of its own motions.

In condemnation of those who presume to hope, that the performance of one duty will obtain excuse for the violation of others, it is affirmed by St. James, that he who breaks one commandment is guilty of all ; and he defends his position by observing, that they are all delivered by the same authority.

His meaning is not, that all crimes are equal, or that in any one crime all others are involved ; but that the law of God is to be obeyed with compleat and unreserved submission ; and that he who violates any of its ordinances, will not be justified by his observation of all the rest, since as the whole is of divine authority, every breach, wilful and unrepented, is an act of rebellion against Omnipotence.

One

One of the artifices, by which men, thus defectively religious, deceive themselves, is that of comparing their own behaviour with that of men openly vicious, and generally negligent; and inferring that themselves are good, because they suppose that they see others worse. The account of the Pharisee and Publican may shew us that, in rating our own merit, we are in danger of mistake. But though the estimate should be right, it is still to be remembered, that he who is not worst, may yet fall far below what will be required. Our rule of duty is not *the virtue of men*, but *the law of God*, from which alone we can learn what will be required.

Secondly, What is that power of godliness without which the form is defective and unavailing?

The power of godliness is contained in the love of God and of our neighbour; in that sum of religion, in which, as we are told by

the Saviour of the world, the law and the Prophets are comprized. The love of God will engage us to trust in his protection, to acquiesce in his dispensations, to keep his laws, to meditate on his perfection, and to declare our confidence and submission by profound and frequent adoration, to impress his glory on our minds by songs of praise, to inflame our gratitude by acts of thanksgiving, to strengthen our faith, and exalt our hope, by pious meditations, and to implore his protection of our imbecillity, and his assistance of our frailty, by humble supplication: and when we love God with the whole heart, the power of godliness will be shewn by steadiness in temptation, by patience in affliction, by faith in the divine promises, by perpetual dread of sin, by continual aspirations after higher degrees of holiness, and contempt of the pains and pleasures of the world, when they obstruct the progress of religious excellence.

The power of godliness, as it is exerted in the love of our neighbour, appears in the
exact

exact and punctual discharge of all the relative and social duties. He, whom this power actuates and directs, will regulate his conduct, so as neither to do injury, nor willingly to give offence. He will neither be a tyrannical governour, nor a seditious subject; neither a cruel parent, nor a disobedient son; neither an oppressive master, nor an eye-servant. But he will not stop at negative goodness, nor rest in the mere forbearance of evil; he will search out occasions of beneficence, and extend his care to those who have no other claim to his attention than the great community of relation to the universal Father of mankind. To enumerate the various modes of charity, which true godliness may suggest, as it is difficult, would be useless. They are as extensive as want, and as various as misery.

We must however remember, that where the form of godliness appears, we must not always suppose the power to be wanting, because its influence is not universal and complete;

pleat ; nor think every man to be avoided, in whom we discover either defective virtues, or actual faults. The power subsists in him who is contending with corruption, though he has not yet entirely subdued it. He who falleth seven times a day may yet, by the mercy of God, be numbered among the just ; the purest human virtue has much feculence. The highest flights of the soul soar not beyond the clouds and vapours of the earth ; the greatest attainments are very imperfect ; and he who is most advanced in excellence was once in a lower state, and in that lower state was yet worthy of love and reverence. One instance of the power of godliness is readiness to help the weak, and comfort the fallen, to look with compassion upon the frail, to rekindle those whose ardour is cooling, and to recall those who, by inadvertency, or under the influence of strong temptation, have wandered from the right way ; and to favour all them who mean well, and wish to be better, though their meaning and their wishes have not yet fully reformed their lives.

There

There is likewise danger lest, in the pursuit of the power of godliness, too little regard be paid to the form, and lest the censure of hypocrisy be too hastily passed, and a life apparently regular and serious be considered as an artifice to conceal bad purposes and secret views.

That this opinion, which some are very willing to indulge, may not prevail so as to discountenance the profession of piety, we are to consider,

Thirdly, how far it is necessary to the Christian life, that the form and power of godliness should subsist together.

It may be with great reason affirmed, that though there may be the appearance of godliness without the reality, there can hardly be the reality without the appearance. Part of the duties of a Christian are necessarily publick. We are to worship God in the congregation ;

congregation; we are to make open profession of our hope and faith. One of the great duties of man, as a social being, is, to let his light shine before men, to instruct by the prevalence of his example, and, as far as his influence extends, to propagate goodness and enforce truth. No man is to boast of his own excellence, for this reason among others; that arrogance will make excellence less amiable, and less attractive of imitation. No man is to conceal his reverence of religion, or his zeal for truth and right, because, by shrinking from the notice of mankind, he betrays diffidence of the cause which he wishes to maintain. He, whose piety begins and ends in zeal for opinions, and in clamour against those who differ from him, is certainly yet without the vital energy of religion; but, if his opinions regulate his conduct, he may with great justice shew his fervour, having already shewn his sincerity. He that worships God in publick, and offends him by secret vices, if he means to make the good part of his conduct balance the bad, is to be censured

censured and instructed ; if he means to gain the applause of men, and to make outward sanctity an instrument of mischief, he is to be detested and avoided : but he that really endeavours to obey God in secret, neglects part of his duty, if he omits the solemnities of publick worship. The form of godliness, as it consists in the rites of religion, is the instrument given us by God for the acquisition of the power ; the means as well as the end are prescribed ; nor can he expect the help of grace, or the divine approbation, who seeks them by any other method than that which Infinite Wisdom has condescended to appoint.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

continued and increased; if he means to gain
the affections of men, and to make himself
fructify an instrument of mischief, he is to
be despised and avoided; but he that really
endeavours to obey God in secret, neglects
part of his duty, if he omits the testimony
of public worship. The form of godliness,
as it consists in the acts of religion, is the
instrument given us by God for the produc-
tion of the power; the means as well as the
end are specified; those can be expected the
help of grace, or the living application, who
seek them in the method than that
which nature has been founded in



Part of the first Volume.

